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Frontline Focus

The business impact of training your frontline staff.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2009

Key ideas for marketing to today's seniors

If you've ever heard Ken Dychtwald, founder of [Age Wave](#) and visionary gerontologist/psychologist/author, speak about the concerns of mature adults today, you know that he often sees things from a unique perspective.

His latest book, [Retirement at the Tipping Point](#), followed more than 2,000 people over time, resulting in a look at people's attitude and experience before and during the current financial crisis. It contains some insights that may prove interesting to all of us who provide services to baby boomers and the elderly.

Financial concerns top the list of issues. This certainly isn't a shocker, but realizing the depth of people's concerns is certainly enlightening. With 60% of American's losing money in their retirement funds, concerns about delay in retirement or unexpected expenses is at the forefront of today's boomers. Interestingly, 81% of the people studied said that the most important piece of financial advice parents can give their children is to "live within your means;" up from only 69% who responded in this way before the market drop.

Lesson for providers? Emphasize, more than ever, the financial wisdom of your product or services. You not only need to demonstrate that you provide value for the dollar; you need to be prepared to discuss how your product or service will comfortably fit within the means of the prospect.

Values are shifting from wealth to relationships. Relationships within families are becoming increasingly important as families support members financially and emotionally. Twice as many respondents identified that "loving family and relationships" are more important than being wealthy.

Lesson for providers? Include family members in conversations whenever possible. Point out ways that your product or service can enhance relationships, especially if you offer personal care services that can allow the family to focus on relationships instead of tasks. Point out how your service can offer family peace of mind, as well, especially if you can emphasize areas where you exceed the usual standards, for example in the training or qualifications of your employees. Frame your benefits in terms of building and nurturing the relationships among the family or friends of the prospective client.

Retirees are seeking to make a difference. They want meaningful work or volunteer opportunities, even into later life. They'd rather not just be stuffing envelopes, either.

Lesson for providers? Be sure your activity and enrichment programs, if you offer them, include opportunities for clients at all levels to continue to contribute. Crocheting hats and scarves for kids or the homeless is something nearly anyone can do, for example.

Overall, Americans are resilient and resourceful, reports Dychtwald. Today, they're more focused than ever on benefits that have meaning – and fit financially – in their lives.

Posted by Sharon K. Brothers at [11:49 AM](#) [0 comments](#) [Links to this post](#) 

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 2009



About Our Team



Sharon K. Brothers

Sharon has been involved in senior care for many years, both as an owner and operator of assisted living communities and now as the President and CEO of aQuire Training Solutions, a family of products to train and support senior care professionals.

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Caregiver Training & Resources



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Friday, May 1, 2009
6 days ago

Top five ways to succeed in this economy

True confession: I love to shop. Nothing is more fun for me than finding something of excellent quality at a bargain price. Must be the ancestral Viking blood that surges through my veins and makes me feel like a warrior.

Every once in a while I go online and start shopping for things that sound like a bargain. Not clothes or toys – domain names. I love website names that seem perfectly logical and descriptive – where else would you go, for example, for your continuing education course than a website named [EasyCEU.com](#)? (we own that one). And if you're a new family caregiver, wouldn't [CaringForMom.com](#) be the logical place you'd turn? (Own that one, too; we plan to launch it fully very soon). My husband and I and a small group of our friends have started a Sunday afternoon hiking group for fun and fitness – so I bought hillhikes.com to record our adventures (it's not live yet; don't bother checking).

Last night I was shopping for another name I'd thought of (it was taken) and came across a video blog that I paused and watched for a full 5 minutes. It's not often I'll even watch a 2 minute youtube video, but this one was right on the mark. I'll give you the link at the bottom of this page, but be forewarned: the blogger, Bob Parsons, is a Hugh Hefner wanna be (my assessment) and he uses some fairly unconventional props in rather unnecessary ways (again, my opinion only). His message, nonetheless, is right on the money.

Title: Top five ways to make this bad economy work for your business.

Key points: Anyone can succeed in a good economy. In a bad economy, our true measure is taken. It's your opportunity to show what you've really got – making it now means you're truly successful. So what should you do?

1) Look for opportunities that arise from less competition. Some of your competition will likely fail, fold or retreat, giving you opportunities that may never exist again in your marketplace.

2) Improve your products and services NOW. You'll stand out while your competition stands still. Take advantage of advertising bargains today – buy commercials you never could afford before; negotiate bigger ads for less money. (Singing my tune!)

3) Find a way to offer your customers more value for less money. People are bargain shopping today like they haven't in years, and they're still buying when the price – and the product – is right.

4) Take advantage of the best talent you can hire, at wages you can afford. Build up the talent in your team while you have some excellent, top-quality candidates to choose from. This won't last, either, as we all know.

5) Renegotiate with your vendors. Your clients are looking for bargains or flexibility; ask your vendors to give you the same benefit. You're a valuable client to every one of your vendors; don't hesitate to ask them for added discounts or payment flexibility.

There are bargains – and benefits – all over in this bad economy. I don't know about you, but I'm shopping!

Here's the link to see the video blog for yourself (remember, though, I warned you): <http://www.bobparsons.me/blog24.html?watch=1>

Posted by Sharon K. Brothers at 3:19 PM [0 comments](#) [Links to this post](#) 

TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2009

Save one dollar or one million with online training

Are you still wondering if online staff training can save your organization money? If that question hasn't yet been answered to your satisfaction, take a look at the latest effort by President Obama's Cabinet to cut costs

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and reduce expenditures.

Top of the list is the Department of Agriculture's plan to cut \$1.3 million by switching from in-person training to internet based training.

The Department of Veteran's Affairs is planning to save \$17.8 million dollars by canceling or delaying conferences, turning instead to internet or video conferencing.

It is now a simple, no-brainer: distance training saves money.

Maybe that's why in the past six months we have seen the biggest growth in new clients in our company, at a time when the same six months have resulted in the worst sales in history for many other companies.

Companies need to save money; at the same time they simply can't afford to stop providing training and enhancing their workforce. It's a time when focusing on the little things – the small expenses, perhaps, that add up over time – and the big things – the quality of care and services you provide – are both competing for your attention.

President Obama is taking a lot of heat from critics for proposing cuts that are too small and don't add up to much. Only \$100 million dollars isn't a lot for a budget the size of the U.S. government's.

But for those of us who manage our own organization's budgets, we know that a few dollars here and a few dollars there add up, over time, to significant savings. Online training is a quick, easy way to start adding up those dollars and saving real money.

Posted by Sharon K. Brothers at [4:44 PM](#) [0 comments](#) [Links to this post](#) 

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 2009

Today's opportunity: Create sustainable systems to reduce turnover and more

As you know, I'm the "glass half full" sort of person. I try to consciously filter out all the doom and gloom of the daily news ("Economic woes much worse than the Great Depression" for example) and focus on the small hidden articles that headline, "Opportunities exist even today!"

Some companies are frustrated because the phone isn't ringing quite so often. The traffic in the door might be lighter, and the anxiety level higher. But when you consider the quieter times as a window of opportunity to plan and execute some new approaches, it can be exciting, too.

Here's the question one of my favorite business consultants suggested: what needs to be done in your company to make it function without your daily presence?

The idea for some people may be to move from full-time-plus into semi-retirement, but for many of us the idea is simply to free up our personal time to write a book, to teach a class, to create a new division within our company. If you're nose-to-the-grindstone day after day, just to keep the current company functions working as you want them to work, you don't have time for these new creative – hopefully profitable – activities.

You may not be the owner of the company, or even work in the "C-suite". The same question, however, is relevant: will the functions that you're responsible for continue without your daily work?

It's a question of systems, really. It's a matter of building expectations for each member of the team so that day after day, month after month, year after year, quality outcome happens.

Creating and implementing sustainable systems takes time, planning, effort and energy. You might need to create a beta-system approach, test it, revise it, re-launch it – maybe several times before you get an approach that becomes sustainable.

Maybe one of your company goals is to reduce employee turnover this year. What sustainable systems will you implement to make this happen, month after month, year after year? PHI has an excellent publication titled "[12 steps for creating a culture of retention](#)" that sets out researched activities any organization can follow for reducing turnover. It breaks into two major areas: Recruitment and selection and creating a culture of retention.

My favorite step? Step #10: Offer robust learning through training, on-the-job learning, career development and advancement.

For this step, we can help you create the sustainable system to continue to offer every single team member opportunities for professional growth and career advancement.

For the other steps, you'll need to evaluate, create, test and implement systems that simply make them a part of what happens in your company.

Automatically. Without your daily nagging or hands' on efforts.

Creating a system that is sustainable takes focus and time. But what better time to create a system for future excellence than today, when perhaps you and other members of your team are just a little less busy than usual? It's an exciting opportunity. Those of us that grab this opportunity and benefit from it will see results long after the economy's turned the corner.

Posted by Sharon K. Brothers at [11:43 AM](#) [0 comments](#) [Links to this post](#) 

TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 2009

The few healthy sectors in our economy

Six years ago my daughter took Health 11 online from Brigham Young University's high school online program. We weren't into home-schooling; she just didn't want to miss her dance classes and had a scheduling conflict. I think it was the only "B" she got that term, too – the course was very rigorous.

Today, online education is one of the fastest growing segments of education in general – and education is, along with healthcare, one of the few healthy sectors in our economy.

What's going on?

Simply this: online education makes good sense. It is increasingly accessible and affordable, and it offers individuals an opportunity to grow and achieve without the customary barriers to higher education like time and location.

Our staff here at aQuire Training Solutions is busier than ever, as new clients contact us, ready to get started – without the traditional need for a sales pitch from our team. They know that, to stay competitive, they need to offer training opportunities to their employees. They are hiring the best and brightest they can find, but realizing that to keep those people engaged and on board they'll need to provide a competitive set of benefits, including continued learning and growth opportunities.

At the same time, companies are looking for ways to reduce any unnecessary expenses. Adding online training is helping them cut instructor time, freeing up that valuable resource for client relationship building, marketing and more efficient management.

They're cutting down overtime and worker's comp claims by increasing the level of employee engagement, knowledge and skills.

They're achieving benefits that, today, are essential for business health.

US News and [World Reports](#) noted this trend, saying,

“time-stressed Americans fed up with commuting costs are already choosing online education. More than 4 million enrolled in at least one online course last fall, up from fewer than 2 million in 2003.”

Typical recession behavior tends to find business operators digging in; avoiding starting new programs or services.

This recession seems to be different. Successful operators are carefully examining how they run their company. They're looking at their highest wage-earning employee's use of time, and focusing that time on activities that bring the most benefit – short and long-term – to the company.

That's keeping our team busier than we've ever been. Mind you, I'm not complaining!

Posted by Sharon K. Brothers at [2:45 PM](#) [0 comments](#) [Links to this post](#) 

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 2009

Compassion fatigue – are we losing our best and brightest to this?

Science Daily ran a [news story](#) April 1 that's no April Fool's joke.

The story details the challenges that health care professionals who care for severely ill, dying individuals experience.

“The term compassion fatigue was first coined in the 1990s to describe a syndrome experienced by a healthcare provider caring for individuals facing dire consequences as a result of their disease. Going beyond empathy or “feeling bad” for the person, it effects the nurse, doctor or other member of the healthcare team in a way that he or she often develops a distance from the patient as a way of self-protection.

Symptoms of compassion fatigue include chronic tiredness and irritability, lack of joy in life, engagement in behaviors which are fine in moderation, such as drinking, at a destructive level. Like individuals who have post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), those with compassion fatigue often re-experience the deaths of their patients, according to Dr. Carney Doebbeling.

Compassion fatigue can lead individuals to protect or insulate themselves by loss of compassion, cynicism, boredom, decreased productivity, more sick days and ultimately higher turnover.”

In my early days training senior care staff, we used to talk about the one certainty we face as senior care professionals: every one of our clients will die. Some quickly; some after many years in our care. But they will all, eventually, die.

That fact makes us all ripe for compassion fatigue. Perhaps it explains, at least a little, the high rate of turnover that is endemic to our profession.

Jennifer Phillips Graham [writes](#) about the arrival of spring – a promise even where it's not yet a reality.

“Sweet, sweet spring – a time of renewal, growth and new beginnings. We encounter rain, mud and slush, but our step is lighter because we know the end is in sight. We've survived cold and darkness, and emerged with a fresh purpose.

When I consider how vital this renewal is to the human spirit, my heart goes out to those who have depleted their reservoirs, those who desperately need refueled. Is a change in weather enough for them?”

Graham goes on to recommend simple things we can do to support people who may be in the grip of compassion fatigue:

“As birds fly in flocks to reduce the energy they expend, we can join forces to lighten the load of nurturers.”

Send a card or flowers to a caregiver you know.

Volunteer your time to give a caregiver a break...Even a “How you doin’?” can lift the spirits.”

As leaders and decision-makers, we’re often out of the daily grind that breeds this depth of fatigue. But we’re in the perfect position to support these individuals; to recognize that caring, with compassion, takes a toll.

A hand-written card. A walk-through that includes time to say, “hi” and “thank-you” to team members. An extra 10 minutes helping at lunch time in the dining room.

These simple things may be unexpected, and all the more powerful to lift the spirits and lighten the psychological load of the most important members of our team: the compassion-filled caregivers.

Posted by Sharon K. Brothers at [3:20 PM](#) [0 comments](#) [Links to this post](#) 

TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2009

Rapid growth in distance education benefits business and individuals

This week is spring break in Oregon.

I happen to be away, taking a much-needed sun break in Hawaii.

But there’s no getting away from me, even though I’m not sitting at my desk pounding out articles this week.

And that’s the miracle of technology.

No matter where I am, I can make sure that some things still happen on time and for the intended audience. It requires some advance planning on my part, but it’s a pretty nice feature of technology – especially if umbrella drinks and sunscreen come with the deal!

I can communicate with you. You can read my communication when it’s convenient for you; neither one of us needs to be in the same physical space at the same time.

That’s one reason why distance learning is growing rapidly today. Last year, according to the [Department of Education](#), 66 percent of 2- and 4-year colleges in the U.S. offered college-level distance education courses; over 11,200 programs were offered that were designed to be completed totally through distance education. Traditional classroom learning is not only inconvenient for many adults, it is not essential. The quality of many online educational programs is equal to, or better than, comparable classroom programs.

Corporations have grasped this benefit as well. Just-in-time training – available when the employee needs it to do his job, or when it’s convenient for him to learn – is clearly here to stay.

New-hire orientation training, with clear presentation of company goals and expectations, (and maybe a personal message from the President) needs to happen for each employee at the time of hire. Few of us hire in groups; fewer still can afford to provide this kind of training one-on-one.

Customer service training, skills training, compliance training – these are all more examples of instances where distance learning is appropriate; often even preferable.

It’s certainly preferable for the President of the company to be able to send out her personal message...while lying on a beach!

Posted by Sharon K. Brothers at [9:48 AM](#) [0 comments](#) [Links to this post](#) 

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