

## Quick Hit: How to Lead in Tough Times

(Excerpted from [http://www.familybusinessmagazine.com/Winter2009\\_visionary.html](http://www.familybusinessmagazine.com/Winter2009_visionary.html))



How do you lead in tough times? Wayne Rivers, president of the Family Business Institute, offers 4 ideas in *Family Business* magazine.

1. **Communicate.** Your people know what's going on in the world, and they often know as much as you do about what's going on with your customers. Sit and talk with them. Be candid about what the economic slowdown is (or could be) doing to your company. Get ahead of the gossip curve before things spiral out of your control.
2. **Get perspective.** Odds are your business has experienced tough times before. (And unfortunately, it probably will again.) Try to put the situation in context for employees. And point out past successes your company has had in tough times.
3. **Look for the opportunities.** If you haven't already, this is the perfect time to ask employees to identify both cost-saving ideas and new markets to go after.
4. **Be upbeat.** If you are negative, eventually your employees will be as well. "If you can't be optimistic, stay out of the office until you can be. At the very least, show strength and resolve in the way you personally handle yourself."

## Do Your Employees Dial 911? A True Story About Conflict and Problem Solving

(Adapted from an article by Cherissa Newton at <http://www.cmo.com/blog/do-your-employees-dial-911-a-true-story-about-conflict-and-problem-solving.htm>)

In late February 2009, a Florida woman called 911 three times to report her emergency: she had ordered and paid for Chicken McNuggets at McDonalds, only to learn the store was out of McNuggets and she would have to order something else from the menu. The woman apparently only wanted McNuggets so she asked, and was denied, a refund. The cashier told her all sales were final and she had to pick an alternative choice. At this point, she panicked and called 911 for help. The woman reportedly told the dispatcher, "This is an emergency. If I would have known they didn't have McNuggets, I wouldn't have given my money, and now she wants to give me a McDouble (a sandwich), but I don't want one. This is an emergency." The police didn't see the situation as one requiring their help and left the woman to resolve it herself. In fact, she was later cited with misusing emergency services. (For their part, McDonalds publically apologized and sent her a gift card.)

Although this news story seems hilarious and far-fetched, similar happenings occur in some workplaces. Coworkers often find themselves in the middle of conflicts and problems. Rather than solving the issues themselves, they may run to managers in hopes that they will make everything better. It occurs for a variety of reasons. Employees may lack the skills to problem solve, feel uncomfortable with conflict, or lack the confidence to confront issues head on. Like the police, effective leaders don't come to the rescue. Rather, they arm their employees with the ability to overcome such challenges. Like the police, effective managers have bigger and more important situations to deal with and can't waste time on situations that can be handled without them. If you are a manager and feel like your employees are constantly dialing 911, you may need to provide some training or skill development around problem solving, decision making, and conflict management.



## Eight Customer Service Tips for Better Business

*(Excerpted from an article by Liz Tahir at: <http://sbinfocanada.about.com/od/customerservice/a/custservtipslt.htm>)*

Business is about the customer, not the product or services. Putting all the focus on the merchandise or services leaves out the most important component: each individual customer. Keeping the individual customer in mind, here are some easy, down-home tips to keep 'em coming back!

1. Realize that your people will treat your customer the way they are treated. Employees take their cue from management. Do you greet your employees enthusiastically each day? Are you polite in your dealings with them? Do you listen to them when they speak? Rude customer service is more of a reflection of management than employees.
2. Do you know who your customers are? If a regular customer came in to your facility, would you recognize him/her? Could you call him/her by name? All of us like to feel important; calling people by name is a simple way to let them know you value them as customers.
3. Do your customers know who you are? If they see you, would they recognize you? Could they call you by name? A visible management is an asset.
4. Are your customers greeted when they walk in the door or at least within 30-40 seconds upon entering? Is it possible they could come in, look around, and go out without ever having their presence acknowledged?
5. Give customers the benefit of the doubt. Proving to him why he's wrong and you're right isn't worth losing a customer over. You will never win an argument with a customer, and you should never, ever put a customer in that position.
6. If a customer makes a request for something special, do everything you can to say yes. The fact that a customer cared enough to ask is all you need to know in trying to accommodate her. It may be an exception from your customer service policy, but (if it isn't illegal) try to do it. Remember you are just making one exception for one customer, not making new policy.
7. Are your customer service associates properly trained in how to handle a customer complaint or an irate person? Give them guidelines for what to say and do in every conceivable case. People on the frontline of a situation play the most critical role in your customer's experience. Make sure they know what to do and say to make that customer's experience a positive one.
8. Want to know what your customers think of your company? Ask them! Compose a "How are we doing?" card and leave it at the exit, or include it in their next statement. Keep it short and simple. Ask things like: what they like; what they don't like; what they would change; what you could do better; about their latest experience there, etc. To ensure the customer sends it in, have it pre-stamped.

Remember that the big money isn't as much in winning customers as in keeping customers. Each individual customer's perception of your company will determine how well you do this and that perception will depend on the level of customer service you provide.

Deer Oaks EAP Services, your Employee Assistance Program, is always available for management consultations and training on a variety of topics including effective leadership, communication, and dealing with difficult people. If you are having issues with your employees, or if you are interested in scheduling a seminar for you and your employees, please contact us at [eap@deeroaks.com](mailto:eap@deeroaks.com) or at 1-866-327-2400. You can also download supervisor training presentations at [www.deeroaks.com](http://www.deeroaks.com).

