How to Help Your Staff Feel Optimistic About 2021

To keep your staff motivated as we move through an uncertain year, don’t overpromise, and don’t hide from the truth.

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Q: My company had a very rough 2020. I have high hopes for 2021, but how can I get my team excited without overpromising? — Jessica, Pittsburgh

After everything that happened in 2020, inspiring hope with a cliché seems, well, clichéd. But as I’ve navigated the unprecedented circumstances of the past year, I keep reminding myself: Necessity is the mother of all invention. (Told you. Clichéd.)

Being forced into change can be a very good thing. Throughout time, disasters, depressions, and diseases have led to innovation, breakthroughs, and growth. That’s because we have no choice but to confront what stands in the way, and evolve and adapt to our environment and circumstances. And if you need proof of that, just look at your entrepreneurial peers — like the people in this magazine. Entrepreneurs tackle

uncertainty head-on because they know opportunities await on the other side of it. They did this long before the pandemic, and they'll do it long after.

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And so can you.

As you make your way through this strange, (hopefully) final stretch of a pandemic, the most important thing you can do is figure out how to ride the wave rather than anticipate a crash. Here are three vital steps to keep you on track.

STEP 1: Take care of yourself.

Our culture tends to equate well-being with physical fitness and nutrition, but we need to spend more time supporting our emotions, too. I'm a big advocate of therapy, especially for entrepreneurs. Oftentimes, you feel alone in your journey, tackle obstacles many people don't understand, and handle a tremendous amount of pressure. These burdens exist all the time, but times of crisis amplify *everything.* Investing in your mental health can help fortify your mind, allow you to explore your problems, and access a support system to ensure you're not overwhelmed by the moment. Talking through your concerns is not weakness; it's a form of grit and resilience.

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STEP 2: Embrace your community.

Take the initiative to reach out to other entrepreneurs to learn how they are handling the situation. Tap into your network, solicit the opinions of friends, reach out to someone on LinkedIn, or even join forums. Whatever you do, don't put yourself on an island. Communicating with others is the

ultimate reminder that there is hope. It's also a great way to hear ideas that can help you build a plan of action. Sometimes it's best not to re-create the wheel but to leverage others' ideas and apply them to your own business.

STEP 3: Include your team.

If you have a team, engage in transparent conversations. The worst thing you can do is hide. When tough times hit, the perception of doom exacerbates fear and distrust, which corrodes confidence. Once it was clear that the coronavirus was going to be a roller coaster, for example, I set meetings with each team at my various companies to allow for open conversations about my employees' concerns. I made it clear that they were a top priority and that no questions were off-limits. And importantly, *I kept having those conversations* – because we don't grapple with a crisis just at the beginning.

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If you haven't started these conversations, now is a perfect time. If your team questions why this didn't happen sooner, be honest and vulnerable. Extend the same approach to contractors and clients – and check in repeatedly.

By addressing any difficult situation head-on, you have the power to disable irrational fear and bring your team closer together. Ultimately, that's the best way to boost morale and give your business a competitive advantage, regardless of the challenges of the situation.

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