Feeling The Recession Depression?

by Anna Wells, Editor, IMPO

In Wisconsin, the months of March and April aren't necessarily spring. Some years we have dream-like spring days; ones where you get to use that word "unseasonably" as a precursor to describe the temperatures. This year, we've been using words like "gloom," "wet," and—my favorite—"severe."

By March, the patience level of the folks here is teetering on the brink. I often think we are all an inch away from losing our minds: fuses are shorter, smiles more reticent to appear.

In recent months, I think a parallel can be made to the blanket of quiet distress hovering just above our collective consciousness here in America. It's not simply a coincidence that the word "depression" has two miserable connotations. The economic one aside, it might bear consideration whether or not you have a handle on how your employees are reacting to this financial crisis in terms of their emotional well-being.

According to a recent article in Medical News Today, "At a time when people across the country are anxious about their jobs and their finances, recession-depression is a real and growing concern."

I'm not saying that your associates need, or want, to be coddled at a time like this. And I'm certainly not trying to turn this into a hug-fest—or for your office to become a revolving door of amateur psychiatric diagnosis. I understand that, as plant management, this is neither your area of expertise, nor your responsibility. That said, this might be a good time to check in with your HR department to uncover the specific resources that are available for employees that are not having an easy time dealing with the stress.

While these folks are not contending with joblessness, they might feel as though job cuts, wage, or workweek/overtime reductions are impending. They may have spouses who have lost jobs or missed out on an anticipated raise or promotion due to cutbacks. Either way—it's a tough world out there, and it's critical to stay keyed into the issues most effecting the people in your plants. Keeping employees happy through company initiatives is typically the backbone of a well-oiled workplace machine, and this overarching malaise—however intangible—is likely effecting some or many of your employees. And don't forget to include yourself in this analysis: a lot of pressure, as company leaders, is falling squarely on your shoulders.

A recent New York Times article discusses the difference between the ways in which America and China are handling the job depletion, mentally. According to the article: "Analysts say that the recent Asian financial crisis and the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome has left the region with an entrepreneurial sense of can-do, a feeling—justified or not—that the current crisis, like the previous ones, will eventually pass."

Does this suggest that the recession will actually improve our long-term outlook? I don't want to see another economic dip that puts that theory to the test. Still, maybe China is on to something here. That old adage, 'whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger' might become more material once we get through this whirlwind. As I stare down the remaining weeks until a temperate spring, I'd like to think the dismal experience just makes me more appreciative of the sun, once it finally appears again.

What's your take? Email anna.wells@advantagemedia.com [1]

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