

When The Going Gets Tough...

By Bruce Carter

I watch very little television. Admittedly old fashioned and square, I find there is simply little on the tube worth watching these days. The glaring exception is of course the PBR. That's right, the PBR—you know, the Professional Bull Riders competition.

Marketed as "The Toughest Game on Dirt," the PBR matches America's roughest, toughest cowboy athletes with today's rank-est rodeo bulls. One hundred and forty pound men competing against nineteen hundred pounds of bucking, twisting, kicking, snorting, highly annoyed beef-on-the-hoof. Now *that* is quality programming in my book.

Tune in sometime and the first thing you discover about the two-legged PBR contestants is that, unlike most professional athletes, when they are hurt, they compete anyway. Strains, sprains, breaks, pulls, tears, twists, contusions, and lacerations are simply taped, casted, wrapped, stitched, numbed, and generally ignored by these tough-as-a-nickel-steak cowboy jocks. In relentless pursuit of that prestigious gold buckle at the end of the season rainbow, professional bull riders get even tougher and persevere long after most "normal" athletes would have called it quits.

In the fire protection business arena it's pretty darned tough too. In this rocky economy sales are down, and customers are more demanding while competitors are out there scrapping like never before for their share of the fire protection equipment and service pie. With every passing week, more and more fire protection companies are feeling the pain and discomfort of the economic pounding.

We have seen tough times before, and it is inevitable that we will see them again, for such is the ebb and flow of the world economy. As the cliché states, this too shall pass. But until it does, there are some specific things we can all do to help weather the turbulence.

Refuse to Buy In

As motivational speaker and human success guru Zig Ziglar says, "Business is neither good nor bad 'out there' but rather it is good or bad between our own two ears."

Did you ever notice how some folks seem to delight in wallowing in depressing news and negativity? Do not join in. Walk away. Do not spend hours in front of the television while the media panders their reports of doom and gloom. Choose to keep your mind out of the despair and woe and instead surround yourself with positive sources of encouragement and optimism.



Work Harder

Many difficult challenges we face can be handled successfully by working harder. In our business, working harder may mean:

Come in earlier and stay later on the job. Arriving to work just fifteen minutes earlier and leaving fifteen minutes later than usual will give us an additional three weeks of time each year. What if you skipped lunch too? What could the results be if the entire team committed to an additional thirty to sixty minutes of productive time daily?

Commit to making at least one cold call on a "non-customer" each day. One per day, five per week, two hundred and forty per year. Even if you are the lousiest sales person in the world you are going to sell one out of ten. What if the entire sales and service team were on board for this one? Hey, that is twenty-four new pieces of business from each person each year that you did not have previously!

Bruce Carter is a popular motivational speaker and sales trainer specializing in the fire equipment industry. Bruce is available to you and your organization for: in-house sales and customer service seminars, in-the-field sales training, and consulting. For information visit www.nafresales.com or call (513) 772-3778.



Close harder. When times are good and sales are plentiful we tend to relax in our sales closing approach. Our philosophy seems to be “if they buy, fine—if not, no big deal.” When times are tougher we can ill afford to treat prospective buyers so casually. When we have a qualified prospect on the line, we must set the hook and not let them wiggle away.

Ask for cash. Our customers take longer to pay when the economy is poor. Sales and service personnel should be trained to ask for cash in an assumptive manner at the completion of each transaction. “*This year’s service comes to \$294.87 Mr. Jones. How did you want to handle that, with cash, credit card, or check?*”

Up the training. The ability to sell is a learned skill. People are not “born” sales people. In a suffering economy it is more important than ever that field people are effective sales people. Now is the time to increase the sales training. As a principal foundation of success in the career of immortal football coaching great, Vince Lombardi, the game basics were reviewed with his team at the beginning of every season. Fire protection sales basics should be taught and reviewed annually with sales and service techs.

Run a contest. A sales contest for the gang to compete in every three to six months does wonders for the moral and enthusiasm of the team. Properly constructed, periodic sales contests will result in a nice win for both employer and employee alike.

Revisit the pending accounts. Remember the maintenance director that was considering the replacement of his unlined linen fire hose back in October? Did we ever follow-up with him and secure that order? It may be too late... but then again, it may *not* be. Why not give him a call and probe for a sale?

Like so many challenges in life, the dark economic clouds will part and the sun will again shine brightly. Until then, the going may be a bit tough. So, partner, buckle on your spurs, pull your hat down tight, and take a firm grip until the whistle blows. Whether you are riding a champion Brahma bull or running an award winning fire protection sales business, when the going gets tough, the tough get going! ♦