

# Recession proof your desk

By Gaynor Lowndes, Managing Director of The Recruitment Training Company

**D**oom, gloom and more doom. That's all I seem to be hearing about these days. Over the Christmas break I pondered if somehow we create our own reality. In fact I have stopped watching the news. I have decided that although I need to be up to date with what is happening in the world, I don't need the negativity associated with nightly news bulletins.

By focusing on the negative, do we perhaps create more negative I wonder? I know that over the last five years of writing for this publication I have pondered many times the question "Do we create our own reality?" If we do, then surely by changing our focus from the negative to the positive we should change our attitudes and therefore our success. I understand that recruiters have no direct control over the economy; however, I strongly believe that we do have control over our levels of success.

A slowdown like the one we are currently experiencing will certainly sort the industry out. Only the business developers will survive. We will move back to a highly driven sales model as fees become harder to find and the market becomes more aggressive.

## The recession we had to have

As much as you don't want to hear it, this slowdown is nothing compared to the "recession we had to have" from 1990-1993. All the recruitment commentators that were around then are getting great mileage out of giving advice about these uncertain times. There are some major differences of course. In this slowdown we have a whole generation that has never experienced hard times, who have very little commitment and have quite unrealistic expectations. This will surely impact the job market over the next few months. As well as that fact, we are still talent short in many sectors.

During the last recession I was in the United Kingdom, working for Accountancy Personnel (now Hays) in Leeds in the north of England. It was bleak. I remember interest rates going from 6% to 18% in a 24 hour period. My base

salary was £4,000 per year which meant that my base salary didn't feed us for the month, let alone pay the mortgage and bills. I learnt to be aggressive in a very tough market. AP (Hays) released league tables every month listing every consultant throughout the UK and their billings (in order from highest to lowest). My goal was to always be in the top 10 out of 300 consultants. I mostly achieved it.

How did I do it? I remained positive. I spent 90% of my time looking for business and I placed anyone that moved. I remember scouring the Yorkshire Evening Post one afternoon and seeing a job advertised for a post mistress. Although an accounting recruiter, I had a candidate registered who had run a post office in her past and I floated her in. She got the job. Another fee on the board.

## Keeping it simple

If you are struggling and wondering where all the business has gone, consider what else you can do. One client who set up a business specialising in the fashion sector came up with the idea to recruit other types of staff within her existing clients. So still specialising in the fashion space, she will provide office, accounting and sales and marketing staff as well as retail. This strategy, along with cutting costs will see her through the downturn.

Whether you like it or not, you need to ramp up your client time; more business development and more client maintenance. Look for any excuse to get in front of your clients – be visible. Aim for 60% of your day to be spent on business development activities. You will need more prospects to produce the same fee results for a while.

## Back to basics

Floating or reverse marketing candidates is a great way to be visible, build your brand and make money during a slowdown. Ensure you have a high quality candidate who has a unique selling point and has great references. Then develop a script around the top three skills

including their USP (unique selling point) and top three attributes. Make sure you quote the referee comments to back up what you are saying. During the last big recession, I spent about 70-80% of my time on the telephone reverse marketing candidates.

## Time management

Big billers during a slowdown are excellent time managers. Know exactly where your time is going and be always asking yourself: "Is this activity earning me fees now or will it in the near future?" If the answer is no then you are not using your time effectively.

## Make marketing fun

When times were really tough, we would make business development fun by listing words on a white board that needed to be "slipped" in somehow to the marketing call and then being awarded points. This may sound silly, but when times are tough and motivation is low, these sorts of fun activities will keep spirits high and make your clients laugh too.

The most important thing to remember is that these times won't last forever. Soon the summer will return again. What you sow now, you will reap then so whatever you do, remember that persistence pays. Stay on the phones during core business times, get in front of your clients and develop strong relationships with quality candidates. Stay positive and you will get through this a stronger consultant. ■



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