

## Four Reliable Ways to Not Participate in the Recession by Betsey Upchurch

*To everything - turn, turn, turn*

*There is a season - turn, turn, turn*

*And a time for every purpose under heaven –The Byrds, music by Pete Seeger, adapted from the Book of Ecclesiastes*

While today's economic news is not good, there is absolutely no requirement that you participate in this recession. People and companies participate by feeling fearful, hoarding resources against an even worse day, and sometimes cutting back on the things that will help them survive and even thrive. When money is tight and work is scarce, it is more important than ever to not participate in fear, hoarding, and doing without essential things in the short run at the expense of long term economic health.

So, how does one "not participate"? There are 4 reliable ways to allow the recession to happen "around" you instead of "to" you.

1. Attitude impacts the outcome. Fear begets a constellation of behaviors that drives negative outcomes and fuels scarcity. Because small business owners are afraid that work will slow down, they cut back on investment in the company, which slows growth. Because large companies fear that if their stock price goes down, they'll have a harder time attracting and keeping investors, they focus on short term goals at the expense of long term investments that may actually help stock prices. Because we as individuals fear job cuts, we are preoccupied rather than turning our considerable brainpower to innovative and creative ways to add value to the job we're in.

Choose an attitude that produces the outcomes you want. Know that you will survive the downturn just as generations before you have. Consider this as a time to rethink what you have been doing and look for opportunities. Many a man was made wealthy during the Great Depression. They weren't lucky; they were flexible enough to quit doing business as usual and look for opportunities. This may be perfect timing to go L.E.A.N. because it makes sense in a way that it didn't when you were so busy. It may be the opportunity to train your employees now that they have a little less to do. Trainers are hungry so the cost may be less. You may want to explore new ways of doing business or innovative ideas that have been meeting resistance from the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" crowd. Accept what is and start working on how you will manage what is emerging.

2. Focus on the right things. And for now, that is your future health. Look for longer term paybacks. Our company is investing in new products and in fixing some of the systems that have not worked well for us in the past. That will help in several ways. First, we feel more energetic and positive. We aren't being dragged down by what we can't control, like customer cutbacks. Second, as a response to our customer needs we can develop really innovative new ways to help them that will be less expensive for them and give us a broader market in the future. Third, by fixing the behind the scenes systems, we aren't paddling so hard beneath the surface – freeing us to be innovative, available to our customers, and decreasing our expenses. So the choice looks like : focus on the revenue that you might not get or focus on creating value by doing things you love. Not much of a choice when you look at it that way.

Focus on what you have control over. As anyone who has ever tried to change a loved one can attest, there is no gain in trying to change what you have no control over. Do you want to be part of the nervous masses or do you want to be part of the solution? Now is the time to focus on making good choices about where to spend and where to cut back. When you let go of the things you can't control, it is easier to see

the choices available to you. Let go of resentment of circumstances and embrace your creative side to make less go a lot further

3. Innovation is born of hard times. We are creatures that like things to go smoothly. When business is good, we want to keep doing what is working. When things are tough, that is when we start trying new things. So take advantage of the recession happening around you to motivate innovation.

Do your homework. Take a really deep look into ideas and issues. In my consulting experience, I have found a distinct tendency to look at issues, problems, opportunities and creative ideas only at the surface level. I see many a leader look at something only long enough to find a few pieces of evidence to support their position or get discouraged at the first obstacle. Making decisions based on so little information guarantees that the better idea that comes from deeper understanding will never happen. It isn't about the original idea, it's about the truly innovative one that arises from a deep dive into the original ideas.

A related point about looking deeply into ideas is to not dismiss even really awful sounding ideas too quickly. Remember, it is about what you find out on the way that gives rise to the best innovations so the more ideas you are looking at, the more you discover along the way.

If you are a people manager, focus on making sure everyone knows what the problems are, what the opportunities are, and how they can make a difference. Unleash the creativity and energy of your people by helping them stay connected, understand the current situation, and how they can add value. Get them engaged by listening, supporting and enabling prototypes or execution of the best ideas.

4. Get set for the recovery. It is never too early to expect it and you want to be ready when it comes. People are still your greatest asset. Make sure they are motivated rather than just waiting for things to get better so they can jump ship. The last thing you want is to have the orders start rolling in and have to bring a bunch of new people up to speed while trying to get back into high gear at the same time. It is what you do right now that will keep your best talent when you need them most.

Be transparent. Let folks know what is happening and what they can do to help. Let people know what decisions are being made about their future and how those decisions are being made. If you have to let people go, do it well. Let everyone know what is happening and why. Keep your best people and reward them for staying with challenging assignments that enhance their careers. Keep in touch with them personally and work with them to make sure they know what their career path is. Ensure they have the tasks they like to do as well as the ones that just have to get done. Catch them doing the right things and let them know they are appreciated.

If you can keep your eye on the longer term outlook and let fear go, no matter what comes, at least you will know what your options are and can take advantage of the opportunities that come your way. There is a lot of hard work to be done and you have the choice to do it with energy and enthusiasm or circle the drain emotionally and make hard work even harder. It's your choice. Are you going to participate in the recession or let it happen around you while you set up your business and your people for the better times ahead?

**About Bristlecone Learning, LLC:** *Bristlecone Learning is a human performance consultancy. We enhance an organization's ability to facilitate, enable, lead and support change. We have ferociously loyal clients that trust our thinking. They depend on us to help them focus on the right things. To build on their strengths. To develop their people. They work hard with us and they get fiercely loyal employees who are engaged and innovative. And that makes a company profitable.*

**About Betsey Upchurch:** *Betsey (Elizabeth) Upchurch is the Managing Partner at Bristlecone Learning LLC and has more than 25 years of experience in organizational development and training. She designs creative and engaging solutions that address the root causes of issues and problems within organizations. Melding experiential technology with online and virtual environments adds a cutting edge dimension to her work.*