

Mission Ready

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Managing the Home Front

Not since the attack on Pearl Harbor has American society been so united and, simultaneously, so full of anxiety. While our military prepares for what could be an extended campaign, those of us on the “home front” have yet to strike back. We are, understandably, in a state of national shock, just as our parents and grandparents were in December of 1941. But that entire generation learned what we are about to realize: that there are many ways to serve your country, even if you are not on the front lines. The attack on Pearl Harbor sparked not only a military response, but a civic response that transformed America into the most productive nation on earth. Although the AXIS powers had had a tremendous head start, with wartime economies already into full swing, American workers caught up with and eventually surpassed them all. Decades later, it was American productivity that won the Cold War, by driving the Soviet Union into bankruptcy.

Less than a month after the horrific attack on the World Trade Center, it is critical that every one of us realize that the most important patriotic gesture we can make is to contribute to the economy our enemies hoped to bring to its knees. As business managers—while anxious ourselves—we must lead our personnel away from the paralysis of anxiety through personal example. There is nothing like strenuous activity to relieve one of one’s fears. Those who report to us

have very natural fears for the safety of the country, for the health of the economy, and for their own very jobs. But they also have very powerful emotions, which have been expressed in a unified roar of patriotism not heard since World War II. That energy must be directed to the workplace for its own good, and for the good of the nation, just as it was sixty years ago.

As managers, we can help the cause by reminding those who report to us how important it is to build up a defiant economy, and how necessary it is to flaunt our freedom in the face of medieval hatred. Americans in uniform—along with the coalition of civilized nation-states—will, in the words of the President, “do us proud.” But those of us on the “home front” must at least try to equal, if not surpass, the workday ethic of our parents and grandparents who faced a similar challenge—brought on by much more powerful enemies than those we face today. There are many ways to serve this wonderful country, but they all funnel down into creating and preserving a strong, sheltering economy. That is a national cause we can all best participate in by continuing to do what we’ve always done at work—only just a little harder.