

# how are you SLEEPING?

What business issues are keeping you up at night?  
What are you doing about them to get a better night's rest?

BY MARK RICHARDSON



**W**hile most of my business advice pertains to what you do or think about during the workday, sometimes a better question to ask is: “What is keeping you up at night?” Or, more accurately, what wakes you up at night and makes it tough to go back to sleep. This topic may be therapeutic, and it may lead to an interesting discussion among members of your leadership team.

In a recent survey of business leaders around the country, this question generated an abundance of responses. Not surprisingly more than 50 percent of the responses cited “uncertainty about the future.” Uncertainty about the stock market causes investors to be more conservative. Uncertainty about the weather affects how and what we grow. Uncertainty does not translate to fear that the world will end or fear that a business will survive. Uncertainty is simply not knowing if the assumptions we make will apply in the future. In any business, uncertainty is a tough place to be.

For business leaders like you, uncertainty always exists. Did you predict 9/11 and its impact on air travel? Or would you have ever predicted a decade ago that interest rates would be almost zero percent today?

Uncertainty can be paralyzing. It is like a virus or cancer, and once you believe so many things are uncertain, you begin to think everything is uncertain. Will the phone ring tomorrow? Will my top salesperson stay with my company?

I believe having some low level of fear is healthy for a business and for all of us personally. It can keep us sharper and help us not take for granted what we do and our need for adjustment and change. I also feel we all need to be rational and play the odds.

The following are a few insights and tips to frame the subject of uncertainty but also to help you get a little more sleep at night.

## Just the Facts

Your emotions are important but can keep you from being rational about the future. For example, you know that most consumers value their most important asset, their home. Their home is not going to improve itself. They are not going to move into a cave and abandon it.

The question is not will they improve their home. It is a question of when

and with what products will they improve their homes. So you need to be more proactive in your efforts to get the opportunities and convince consumers that your products not only are good, but also necessary so “their home does not die.” Now is a great time to relandscape or add more plants.

## Know the Odds

In times of uncertainty, you need to be a little more conservative and play the odds. If you know that past customers are a good source of new business, then you may want to pursue more marketing strategies wrapped around them. If you are thinking about launching a new product or service, you may want to take a little more time to flesh it out before pulling the trigger. Again what you want to do in more uncertain times is to increase your odds for success, not hide under your bed.

## The Other Side of the Coin

Write down all of the things that uncertainty brings: your business not growing; your team becoming disillusioned, your frustration from not doing or trying new things, etc. You and your team should write down all the things that uncertainty brings. Then you should follow up by writing down a question I often ask myself: “What is the worst thing that can happen?” This list will show that the worst may not be so bad after all and it could actually help you pick the winners. This exercise brings conviction and confidence!

Nobody has a crystal ball that predicts the future, and I do not believe in psychics. It is the business leader's job to be the guiding light and help make sense out of uncertain times.

It is your job to make the right decisions in uncertain times. It is the business leader's job to inspire others and reduce some of the fog and fear they have for the future. This is not easy but is extremely important to not only survive but also to thrive. ■

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