

# 3 ways to combat BATTLE FATIGUE

BY MARK RICHARDSON

Don't let battle fatigue weigh you down, rather put the spotlight on addressing and overcoming it.

**W**hile I am not a soldier, and have therefore never been in combat, I often use images and metaphors as a tool to make sense out of things, and “battle” and “war” often seem to relate to business.

I asked a friend of mine who is in another industry recently how he and his colleagues were doing. He said they were experiencing the same “battle fatigue” that everyone else is. I felt his simple comment described the current business environment accurately. But it also provided some insights to possible solutions.

When used broadly, battle fatigue can describe the personal condition that arises from any prolonged and difficult situation. Battle fatigue wears you down both physically and emotionally. Battle fatigue creates uncertainty, affects confidence and ultimately reduces overall effectiveness and success.

When you begin to recognize this condition in your team (which often is pretty obvious), then you need to focus on addressing it.

A good first step would be to draw on the words of military leaders, many who are well versed in dealing with the real condition of battle fatigue. Here are a few ways to think about this dynamic when dealing with your team, your clients and your partners.

## YOUR TEAM

Think of your team as a group of rubber bands, each with differing levels of elasticity. In today's business climate, each of your people are being stretched — some to places they have never been.

Some can be stretched to amazing lengths (often the owner or leader); others will snap if they are stretched too far. The common denominator is that they are all rubber and they all stretch, but they all have different tolerances.

As a leader you need to recognize the differences so as not to have them snap.

## YOUR CUSTOMERS

Battle fatigue is also a dynamic that describes your customers. They have the same big picture concerns as you. They are nervous about the future. In their mind their home is no longer a safe haven for planting funds.

While they have the same yearning for a beautiful home, the economy has them paralyzed. Your role today needs to be more of a voice of reason, a thera-

pist and a friend. If you look at your time, what percentage of time is dedicated to wearing these hats?

## YOUR PARTNERS AND SUPPLIERS

Battle fatigue is also even more apparent with business partners and suppliers. Since they are more dependent than ever on the business you send them, they can be especially aggressive with you on cash flow.

They may compromise their quality or integrity for doing whatever they need to do to survive. This behavior may change the way you look at them. It is important to at least take this fatigue into account as you are judging them.

## SOLUTIONS

While there is no magic pill that will fix this condition, I do believe there are a few things you can do to improve things:

**1 Make it important**  
Once you make addressing battle fatigue a priority, then creative answers will come.

**2 Talk about it**  
When people discuss battle fatigue they feel better. They realize they are not alone. Try to focus on the “why” and share tips of how people are coping with it. Although it is personal (i.e. the rubber band) it should be discussed more in the context of it vs. them.

**3 Add fun**  
If you watched the TV show *M\*A\*S\*H*, an answer or two might be revealed. They worked very hard, but they also played very hard. Fun does not have to be a party. It can be just taking a moment to share a story or a funny joke. It is hard to feel fatigued when you are smiling.

In closing, while I don't have a crystal ball to say the economy will improve dramatically to address this condition, I do think business leaders need to make this a proactive item on their To Do list. ■

*Mark Richardson is the author of the best-selling book, How Fit is Your Business?, and the forthcoming book, Business Themes to Live By, to be published later this year.*