

Highly resilient sales organizations will survive

Denver Business Journal - by [Colleen Stanley](#)

What's the reason some companies thrive during tough economic times while others merely survive — or go under?

There are the practical reasons, such as particular sectors of the economy getting hit harder, i.e., the airline industry after 9/11 and the housing market today.

There are also external factors beyond our personal control. The names Freddie and Fannie, and the phrase “fat cats” come to mind.

Paul Stolz, author of the “Adversity Quotient,” shares another reason for thriving or surviving: resiliency. Stolz devotes much of his work to the study of highly resilient organizations and individuals. His research shows that resiliency accounts just as much as intellect and energy for success during tough times.

Stolz measures resiliency — the ability to overcome adversity — in four quadrants. He calls it the CORE formula.

See how your sales organization stacks up in the area of resiliency.

- **Control** — Anyone in sales feeling out of control? Sales teams exhibiting high scores on control focus on what they can do, not what they can't do. They know they can control the following:

(1) Their sales activity plan — High-control organizations kick up the activity, knowing they need more prospects in the pipeline due to potentially longer sales cycle and more competition on the same opportunities.

(2) Relationship with good clients — In tough economic times, don't forget who brought you to the party. Ask not what your clients can do for you; ask what you can do for your clients.

(3) Exploring new niches — Now may be the time to look at industries where your core competencies are a match and a value.

• **Ownership** — Stolz defines this as owning the outcome of any situation, regardless of the origin.

A great example comes from a young sales manager who lacked a big budget for incenting her sales team, but still was responsible for achieving quota in tough selling environment. Instead of crying the blues about no budget, she took control and ownership over her destiny.

She went around to all the bars and restaurants where they offered drawings for happy hours and/or food. As a result, her sales team enjoyed many team-building events after hours because of her take-charge, ownership attitude.

Resilient, high-ownership organizations look out the front window and the rear window. They don't blame. Instead, they ask what part of this downturn should we own? What systems and processes could we have had in place to ease the pain of the downturn? What people should we have hired/fired before the downturn? Today, what can and must we change? What must we do different?

After answering the questions, they take control and act.

• **Reach** — Stolz's research shows that highly resilient individuals and organizations are able to limit the reach of the adversity. In other words, they don't kick the dog when they get home.

Limiting the reach of adversity can be correlated with the stress management. High levels of continuous stress result in production of the stress hormone cortisol. High levels of cortisol affect cognitive performance. In these economic times, salespeople need the ability to think and react quickly.

Top producers manage stress by limiting the reach of a lost sale. They look at it for what it is: one lost sale. They don't allow negative self-talk to take over, i.e., I've lost my touch, no one is buying or the competition is better.

It's similar to an outstanding NFL quarterback. One intercepted pass is one intercepted pass. It doesn't affect the next play or the game. One lost sale doesn't affect the rest of the week.

• **Endurance** — This is a person or company's ability to do a reality check on the adversity. Is the adversity temporary or permanent?

Take the case of the economy. We have come off of an extremely long election cycle, major companies imploded in a matter of weeks, and the Dow looks like a ride at Six Flags.

The highly resilient person knows financial cycles come and go. This cycle is serious and deep. But it will be temporary (anyone lived through the interest rates of the 1980s?).

The mantra of highly resilient organizations is, "This, too, will pass." When the adversity is perceived as permanent, inaction and paralysis takes over.

What's your sales team's CORE score? Remember, tough times don't last, and tough people do.

Take control, own the outcomes regardless of the origin, limit the reach and know that bad economic times aren't forever.

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