



# Your people, your growth


Staying up in down times

June 9, 2009



## Objective

- Get intelligent about the impact uncertainty has on employees
- Learn actions leaders can take to help employees survive during ambiguous times
- Choose from a list of steps to take to stabilize your workforce



“. . . as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns -- the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones.”

Donald Rumsfeld, in a February 12, 2002 news briefing to the Department of Defense

## What is uncertainty?

Uncertainty exists when details of situations are ambiguous, complex, unpredictable, or probabilistic, when information is unavailable or inconsistent, and when people feel insecure in their own state of knowledge or the state of knowledge in general.

(Brashers, 2001)

## What is uncertainty?

Because uncertainty is primarily a self-perception about one's own cognitions or ability to derive meaning, a person who believes himself or herself to be uncertain is uncertain. Lacking knowledge is somewhat independent of self-assessment about one's state of knowledge.

(Brashers, 2001)

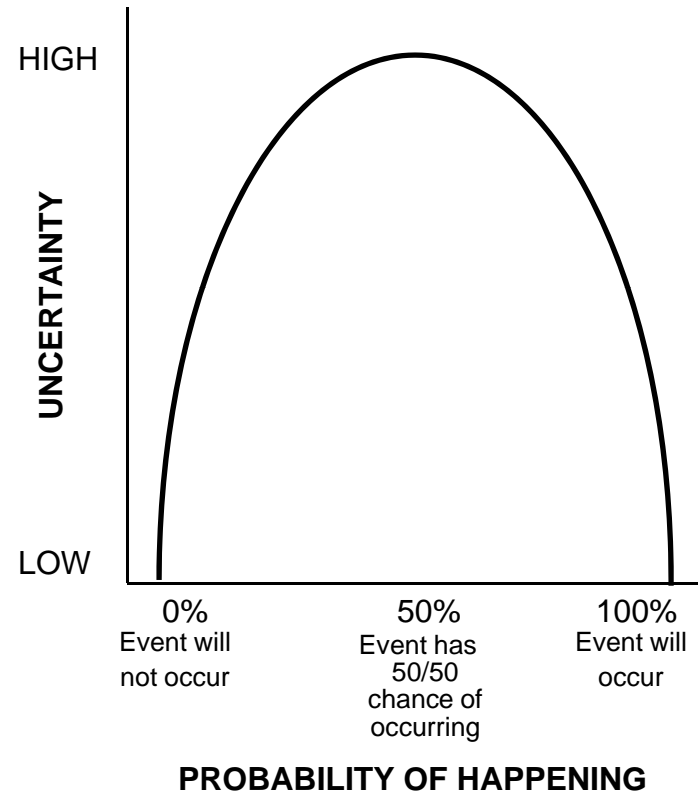
## What is uncertainty?

Uncertainty is when YOU feel like you:

- Don't know enough, or
- Have enough information, or
- Have enough access to the right information to feel certain.

## What is uncertainty?\*

- Lowest when the probability of something happening is 0% or 100%
- Highest when the probability of something happening is 50%
- Uncertainty increases as the likelihood of an event occurring or not occurring becomes equal



\*Adapted from Bashers, 2001.



## About what are you uncertain?


- Are there influences you know will NOT occur or you are 100% certain WILL occur?
- What unknowns are out there that have a 50/50 chance of occurring, about which you are most uncertain?
- What do you wish you had more certainty about to better operate your organization?



**Scenario**

## Uncertainty reduced . . . but not by being certain

- **No actual facts changed at all**
- Leader absorbed the uncertainty
- Cleared the way for them to move forward with confidence



Uncertainty is the only certainty there is, and knowing how to live with insecurity is the only security.

John Allen Paulos, Professor of Mathematics,  
Temple University in Philadelphia



## Do you have all the information you need to operate intelligently?

- Uncertainty is a mental mindset.
- What impact might uncertainty be having on us and on our teams?
- Is uncertainty making an impact on your organization right now?  
What might that look like?



## **Do you have all the information you need to operate intelligently?**

- What impact would it have on your ability to operate effectively?
- Uncertainty can be a major distraction
- Understand, recognize, and plan for the affects of uncertainty

## Negative emotional responses

- *“Donors aren’t going to give in 2009. I will probably get laid off. I better lay low and not draw any attention to myself so I fall off my manager’s radar screen and my name doesn’t come up when lay-offs are discussed.”*
- *“Donors aren’t going to give in 2009. I will probably get laid off. I better work night and day to over-prove myself so I am at the center of my manager’s radar screen and my name doesn’t come up when lay-offs are discussed.”*

## Positive emotional responses

- *“Donors may or may not give in 2009. Maybe now my boss will be open to hearing my ideas for ways we can shorten our process to be more efficient.”*
- *“Donors may or may not give in 2009. Now there’s no way we will move ahead with the superfluous project my boss gave me and I’m sure we’ll all get down to brass tacks and focus on what’s the most important. Alright!”*

## Neutral emotional responses

- *“Donors may or may not give in 2009. I am going to slow down a bit and just wait to see what happens.”*

## Uncertainty vs. anxiety

- “Reducing uncertainty” is not the same as “managing the effects of uncertainty.”
- Learn to manage the effects of uncertainty.



## Managing uncertainty

- Information and uncertainty
- Manage (not eliminate) uncertainty in your workforce

## Provide Clear Direction

- Remind everyone **why** you must stay in business and achieve your mission
- Clear goals
- Redefine tasks
- Offer assumptions
- Provide hope



## Engage Your Employees

- Get others involved
- Don't shrink in your posture, but rather, expand and invite.
- Tap into the wisdom and energy of your team.
- Increase internal relationship building and collaboration



## Engage Your Employees

- Encourage new ideas
- Hold brainstorming and planning sessions
- Involve employees specifically on the decisions that affect them



**Communicate differently—with empathy**

## **Allow time for negativity**

- Allow the transition process
- Allow forums for airing grievances and expressing feelings
- Hold rumor-busting meetings to debunk rumor-mill myths
- Hold many Q&A forums


## Communicate early and often

- Information needs to create perceptions of coherence
- Choice of information sources
- Combat information avoidance
- Provide risk information in ways that minimize distress and maximize processing ability
- Avoid obsessive information seeking



## Lead Differently

- Adaptability is a leadership imperative
- Manage complex and unknown challenges and thrive in times of transition




If, to keep up with the changing times, your organization is required to do anything different from before, leaders will need to provide training, coaching, and reorientation.

This helps reduce anxiety, increase competence, build skills for the future, regain identity, and reorient employees.

## **If it comes to layoffs . . .**

- Changing image of the workforce
- Prove that employees matter and are valued
- Be sure employees are gaining the new skills
- Be a visible leader
- Be involved and engage the employees
- Acknowledge and offer ways to manage the stress



“Strangely enough, this is the past that somebody in the future is longing to go back to.”

Ashleigh Brilliant, artist and writer

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# Thank You

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