

**opinion**

## Support your leaders in turbulent times

The recession is putting many leaders and managers under pressure. Executive coach and psychologist Catherine Sandler looks at how they can be helped to cope.



As the tremors of the economic 'earthquake' continue, the morale of even the most optimistic business leader is threatened.

Leaders attempting a consistently upbeat attitude run the risk of striking a false note. Significant levels of doubt, stress and anxiety are inevitable and the authentic and effective leader will acknowledge their negative feelings rather than play down or attempt to ignore them.

Leaders who recognise their vulnerabilities under pressure will cope best – not through giving in to doom and gloom but by using emotional intelligence to contain their low moods and manage their behaviour. Coaches and HR professionals play an important role by understanding key elements that threaten morale.

Most leaders have a powerful sense of responsibility. They fear not being able to protect their workforce (or family) and may suffer tremendous guilt when measures such as redundancies are taken.

Highly-competitive, driven individuals, many leaders are haunted by a fear of failure and the associated feelings of exposure and shame.

Recessions force rapid organisational change. Staff experience multiple losses – opportunities, colleagues, jobs – and leaders are not immune to feelings of shock, anger, impotence and grief.

Personality type, life-experience and business situation mean that not all leaders are similarly affected though few escape without some degree of emotional turmoil. So what helps?

- Knowing that these feelings are normal and to be expected
- Recognising their personal pattern of underlying fears and concerns
- Anticipating specific stress 'triggers' and planning coping strategies
- Having trusted and supportive family and friends to share important thoughts and feelings
- Really good self-care – healthy nutrition, sound sleep, regular exercise, holidays, and time to relax.

These steps help senior executives develop the resilience to lead their businesses through ongoing uncertainty. By acknowledging and managing their worries rather than denying them, they will find the inner strength to remain motivated and energised for the difficult work ahead.

Leaders who recognise their vulnerabilities under pressure will cope best