

Dealing with Uncertainty

Organizations have spent years learning how to deal with uncertainty. Human resource and training departments address “change management” and the fear that change can breed among executives, managers and employees alike. We explore diversity issues and try to learn how to work productively with people we don’t really understand very well. We do crisis management to prepare for the unexpected. We are no strangers to uncertainty.

The current environment, however, is testing the limits of our coping skills. We face the uncertainty of a war that has deeply divided the world; an economy that refuses to rebound from recession; technologies that promise more than they currently deliver; budgets that have been slashed; corporate scandals that have left once robust organizations as withered shells or worse; long protected and respected public policies like affirmative action under legal challenge; universal job insecurity. How much uncertainty can we adapt to?

The answer is – we don’t know. We are uncertain about how to respond to all the uncertainty. We are dealing with conditions that most of us have never experienced. The once clearly defined is now blurred. Who are our allies and who are our foes? Do we increase taxes or cut them? Is e-learning going to save money or just cost us more? How can I train employees to be more productive if I have no budget? Are our business leaders visionaries or thieves? Does affirmative action discriminate against people or help them?

In such times, it is easy to get lost. The confusion can be dizzying. So we need to find a way to ground ourselves – to find those things about which we CAN feel certain. What are they?

We can feel certain that the world has experienced terrible traumas before and survived. We can feel certain that every economic downturn is eventually followed by a recovery. We can feel certain that if we treat people with dignity and respect, they will feel valued. We can feel certain that if we seek to learn we will benefit from the process. Most important, we can feel certain that better times are ahead. We may not know what they will look like or how long it will take to get there, but layer by layer the uncertainty will be replaced by insights, learning, and wisdom.

As human resource and training professionals we are tasked with helping employees do their best work as valued, welcome members of our organizations. This is important, positive work and there’s no uncertainty about that.