

Let the good times roll

Amar Vasdev consults business high-flyers for advice on how to foster the feelgood factor in a credit crunch climate



CYRUS TODIWALA MBE

Chef and restaurateur of
Cafe Spice Namaste group

Have you had to adapt?

We dug deep. Business took a major downturn for us in 2008, so we had to adapt to survive. We looked at growing an area of our business that was peripheral before – ground. Looking to make it more efficient, we modified it and made our products faster without sacrificing quality. It worked, due mainly to the hard-working team we

had there this summer. We have also seen a rise in the sales of our chutneys, pickles, fresh sauces, ambient spices and pastes.

How have you kept morale high?

When you are all working to a common goal, it makes you feel more positive knowing that you have a top team by your side. We spoke to staff about the gravity of the situation and said if anyone felt they ought to move on and seek greener pastures to feel free to do so. No one left and all decided to help by deferring salaries –
Go to cafespice.co.uk



ALOK MITRA

Managing director of CJM Consultants Ltd, a management consultancy specialising in helping small to medium-sized businesses

Have you had to adapt?

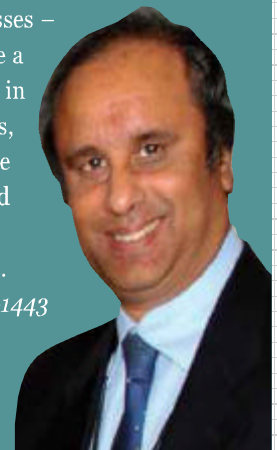
We have been gearing up for this recession for a number of years and are looking to exploit it for commercial gain. We've lost some clients, as it is harder to get consultancy work in the current climate, but on the accountancy side we have won some big clients who have "switched down" and taken us on. We're also creating a fund to invest in businesses over the coming years.

How have you kept morale high?

Fortunately we have kept ourselves debt free, so we are not in a defensive situation. This allows us to expand, grow and broaden our horizons. We will come out of this recession with more employees and this will make us all feel good that we are growing. If you have good cash flow and a job you will be better off in this recession as mortgage rates are low and you will be making huge savings. It is an exciting time for so many businesses –

you cannot be a rabbit caught in the headlights, you have to be optimistic and look for the opportunities.

Call 08452261443



IQBAL WAHHAB

Restaurateur, CEO and founder of Roast restaurant

Have you had to adapt?

We are actually in the lucky position to have grown – five and 15 per cent compared to the same week the previous year – the time we have been in recession. People are still spending money, but they are just being more careful where they spend it, and just as companies are having to work harder to win business, I tell my team that we have to work harder to ensure that what money people have to spend, they spend with us. We are working harder than ever to keep our brand constantly refreshed, working harder on menu development, design and art, and marketing. It is a commonly understood fact that businesses that invest in themselves during the recession fare better than others when we emerge from it.



How have you kept morale high?

We analyse each and every aspect of the customer experience. I am less tolerant of service mistakes. Indeed, staff understand that there is no longer a shortage of skilled staff available, as many restaurants aren't as fortunate as us and are having to make cuts and in many cases close. That means there is more talent available to enhance customer satisfaction. We have to keep giving people reasons to come back – that by converting "customers" into fans. Go to roast-restaurant.com

GEETA SIDHU-ROBB

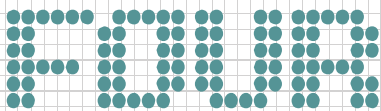
Author and founder of Nosh Detox, a popular juice-based diet programme

Have you had to adapt?

I have focused on two things. Firstly, on how many ways I can sell what I'm already making, so that I can increase my revenue streams by cross selling. Secondly, on how many different markets I can sell it in, so that it broadens my potential audience. The more people that hear about us, the more chances we have of selling to at least some of them.

How have you kept morale high?

Do a juice fast! I find that I work on myself as much as I work on my business. I allocate time for personal growth every single day, as much as I allocate time for looking at my business. A healthy diet and body work can both make a difference. I have personally not had so much fun in years, growing this business and learning step by step to be a CEO of an emerging company. We learn every day and grow every day, and it's such a blast. Go to noshdetoxdelivery.com



RAEF BJAYOU

Former contestant on *The Apprentice* and presenter/marketing chief for production company TV London

Have you had to adapt?

You have to adapt to the recession. At TV London we have had to review the business plan and effectively find out where we are spending most of our money. We realised we were spending too much on marketing. This was an area where we could cut back without affecting much of our revenue stream.



How have you kept morale high?

It's about sharing good leadership. When you are surrounded by individuals who are fearful of losing their jobs, you need to try and instill a sense of security, but also be open. We did have to implement wage cuts but you make it clear that although in the short term they are necessary, in the long term we should all benefit. You shouldn't try to paint too rosy a picture.

I am enthusiastic and determined, qualities I hope are infectious. I also enjoy spending time with friends and family – it helps me realise there are far more important things in life. A change of scenery can help.

Go to raef@raef.tv





ROBIN SHARMA

Life coach, business guru and best-selling author

Have you had to adapt?

Rather than coasting through the recession, we are actually innovating and growing more. Now is an excellent time to take bold risks because your competitors are too scared to.

How have you kept morale high?

To stay at my peak, professionally and personally, during these turbulent times there are a few things that I do every day.. I get up at 5am and write in a journal. This allows me to clear my mind and record my goals and plans for the day. I exercise. Daily exercise boosts your mood, gives you greater energy and keeps you calm. I visualise performing the way I want to perform as often as I can. This sets me into the mental state of thinking like a leader versus playing the victim.

Go to robinsharma.com



SATI TAKHAR

Fashion designer and CEO of Sati, specialising in Asian bridal couture

Have you had to adapt?

The Asian wedding industry is, in many ways, recession proof. People still spend good money on having the best possible wedding. A lot of clients save on lavish venues and ask parents to put that money towards a deposit on a new home, for example. But people still pay a premium for good quality service.

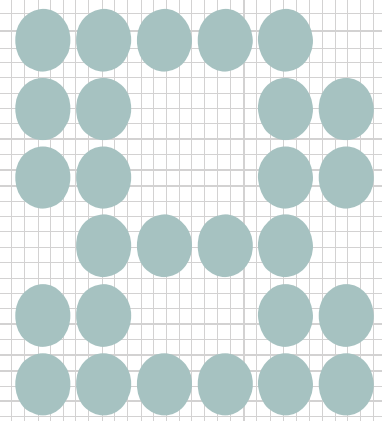
How have you kept morale high?

I think every day is different and the clients give us new challenges all the time. Every client walks in with a new set of expectations

— a buzz to help people with their weddings, which are happy occasions

— feelgood factor:

Sati, 389 Saho Road, Birmingham. Call 0121 551 3900 or go to satitakhar.com



DR MAH HUSSAIN-GAMBLES

Founder and formulator of organic and halal skincare range, Saaf Pure Skincare

Have you had to adapt?

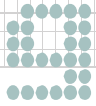
The business model has stayed largely the same. Being very ethical and green means we outsource everything, so we don't need expensive offices and warehouses. I work from home, which is very cost effective!

How have you kept morale high?

My ethics motivate me and keep me positive. I hope to make Saaf Pure Skincare a global success, and this is something I work towards every single day. To "feel good" personally, family is key. I like to spend time with my children. In fact, nothing makes me happier.

Go to saafpureskincare.com





VISHAL PATEL

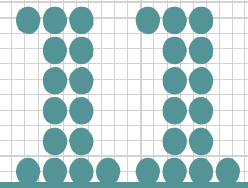
Sales and marketing manager of package holiday specialists **Travelpack**

Have you had to adapt?

The team is working more as a group, each department working efficiently and helping other departments reach a common goal. We have developed our website and IT infrastructure, to make it faster and more user friendly. We had to find new marketing avenues as traditional methods were generating a poor response. Customer service becomes of huge importance, too.

How have you kept morale high?

By making an effort to keep the atmosphere in the office relaxed. Managers conduct one-to-one meetings each month to assess performance and get constructive feedback to improve efficiency of the company. This ensures employees feel valued. Go to travelpack.com



SURAN GOONATILAKE OBE

Entrepreneur and chairman of **Bodymetrics**, an innovative body scanning and tailoring system

Have you had to adapt?

Fortunately for Bodymetrics, whose core asset is innovation, our sales are up by about three times compared with last year. There are pockets of the economy, especially those linked to online retail, online services and technology-based services that have not seen a downturn.

I think the hardest hit companies are ones who operate in a sector where there are many, many players offering the same product or service – these sectors there has been a "survival of the fittest" phenomenon.

How have you kept morale high?

The key to morale building is to treat your employees well, and keep reminding them that their role within the company is not simply to "do a job" but to share in the company's vision. For Bodymetrics, we want to fundamentally change the way we buy clothes –

a better, more efficient and fun experience. Go to bodymetrics.com



LOPA PATEL MBE

Founder of **Redhotcurry.com**, a British Asian lifestyle and shopping website

Have you had to adapt?

We have cut expenditure where possible; re-negotiating our server rental, utilities and phone line. On the e-commerce front, we've been heavily discounting prices to consumers; we have increased online ad spend but changed the mix of who we spend it with, and, like most retailers, we have had to put a "stop" on non-essential new stock purchases.

How have you kept morale high?

By demonstrating leadership and taking action, however unpleasant! We are straight with our suppliers and staff. As a business, we have increased marketing activity so staff can see that we are trying. We have also considered four-day and three-day working week instead of lay-offs, but then staff decided to use up their holiday allowances for quiet days instead. On a personal level I have become involved in not-for-profit activities. It is important to realise that you can bring about social change by donating time, not just money. We go for walks, I invite friends over. Good conversation and exercise are great morale boosters! Go to redhotcurry.com

