



# Time's Up

This is your moment to build. Don't retreat.

Dan Beaulieu

**E**nough with the economy already! Salespersons all over the country are telling their bosses they can't make their numbers because of the slowdown. They point to recent shutdowns of some larger shops and say, "That's why we are not booking orders." I find this especially galling (and so should you)

when talking about shops that are under \$15 million in annual revenues. This is a \$43-billion industry. Companies are still buying boards. Cisco's inventory woes have little to do with an \$8-million board shop in Houston or Boston or Phoenix. But suppose they do. So what? Should we roll over and die? Should we stop trying to sell until things get better? That's a loser's game. Instead, when Sales says they can't book new business (or maintain former levels) until the economy improves, ask them:

- Have you contacted all existing customers?
- Do they all say that their business is down?
- How much in boards do they buy each year? How much are we getting? How do we get more?
- Are they happy with their suppliers? Can we have the chance to replace those they are unhappy with?
- Have you contacted every potential and target customer in your territory? Why not?
- Have you sent each of them our literature? Have you visited them?
- Do they know what we can do for them?
- How much business does each do every year?
- What does it take to become one of their suppliers?

- Have you pointed out that this is an excellent time to try a new supplier?
- Have you told them that we are willing to make it easy for them to work with us?
- Can I see your forecasts for these target accounts?
- Can I see your account plans for these companies?
- If they can't do business with us now, have they given you a date when they will?
- Have you thought about exploring territories we do not currently cover?

By the time you're done, Sales will get the point that there is a great deal more to do before invoking the "bad economy" defense. And if Sales is smart, they will have questions of their own:

- Can you make sure that our marketing tools are current? Our literature updated?
- When will our Web site be up?
- Can we offer two-week turns? An introductory discount for new customers?
- Can you ensure sales mailings go out on a weekly basis?
- Is that new brochure finished yet?
- When will we achieve full on-time delivery?
- When will quality reach six-sigma?
- When will we offer the technology that three of my largest customers want?

- When will we be ISO registered?
- When will we have a strategic planning meeting to focus on our niche?
- Why can't we go to trade shows? Or advertise in the right places?
- Our biggest competitor is going out of business; can we make a bid to take over his backlog and current bookings, thus increasing our market share?
- Can we partner with a quickturn shop? An offshore fabricator?
- Can we try something completely new?
- Can we service our customers better than anyone else ever has?

And everyone should ask, "Can we use this time to make our shop better than it has ever been before?" When times get tough the most tenacious of us usually find a way to become winners and industry leaders. Now's the time for positive action, not whining or excuses. Economic conditions are out of your control, but you control the actions you take to combat them. It is up to you whether you merely survive or thrive during tough times. And most of that success will be based on good selling.

**PC FAB**

*Dan Beaulieu is a founding partner in D.B. Management Group (German-town, WI), a consulting firm to PCB manufacturers. He can be reached at 262-250-9653; dbmpcb@aol.com.*

Whether you thrive or merely survive during tough times is up to you.