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## DOING MORE WITH LESS

Doing more with less is a reality in today's economy, especially with businesses closely tied to the consumer market. In a May 2, 2008 Wall Street Journal article, the Institute for Supply Management's employment index indicated that manufacturers are slashing jobs or choosing not to replace departing workers. In the same article, the Labor Department said that jobless claims soared from 35,000 to 380,000 at the end of April, moving closer to a level usually associated with recessions.

What does that mean for business? Growth today is most likely going to be generated from improved productivity. What does that mean for your team? The dynamic and how well people work together will have a huge impact on productivity.

So, what can you do to improve your team's effectiveness and productivity?

**Build Trust:** Step 1 is building a foundation of trust across the team. Trust is generated by many factors, but two of the most important factors are (1) creating an environment of open communication, and (2) helping team members get to know each other at a deeper level than just, "Hi how are you, and how was your weekend?" You'll know you have a team that trusts each other when team members look out for each others' interest and don't get caught up in turf wars and politics.

**Engage Your People:** Step 2 is to create a team dynamic that encourages people to participate in discussions, problem solving, and decision making. The people closest to your business and your customer probably know more about your business and your customer than you do. Ask for their input, listen to their ideas, include them in solving problems, and give them challenging assignments. When trust and participation are in place, you will have a team that is committed to being productive (and will go beyond what you ask them to do) versus a team that is compliant (and does only what you ask them to do).

**Create Alignment:** During the process of building a committed team that trusts each other and is actively contributing, ensure that you have clarity. Clarity starts by understanding the organizational strategic plan, integrating that plan into departmental goals, and then rolling out individual performance goals. All three levels should be aligned. If your team members are working on "things" that are not tied to a corporate strategic objective, they are working on the wrong things. Keep your team focused, keep your team aligned. Keep your team accountable to individual and organizational objectives.

**Continue learning:** Helping your people to learn and grow should be a never ending process. Start monthly brown bag lunches, encourage team members to be active in professional associations, and train your managers and team members on how to communicate, resolve conflict, and work together.

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Conduct monthly all-staff meetings. Conduct regular one-on-ones. Help people learn and grow so that they have the knowledge and interpersonal skills to do more with less.

Doing more with less is usually not a fun endeavor, but when people trust each other, are actively engaged in the business, are aligned and focused, and continually learning, you'll build a productive and committed team. And, if every team did these things well, we might just pull out of this rough economy all by ourselves.

## **About 5.12 Solutions**

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