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Now that we're into 2012, it's hard to escape the idea of personal improvement, which is perhaps why there is a peak in job seekers at this time of year. Combine this outlook with a workforce feeling undervalued from pay freezes, threatened by RIFs, and de-motivated from having to do yet more with less, and you have a significant threat to your talent retention. But while your employees (and possibly you) are browsing recruitment web-sites to see what opportunities may be out there, it can pay dividends to re-frame the concept of personal improvement and use it as a foundation from which to strengthen your retention program and develop the current, and future, leadership of your organization. Such an approach can help your employees to remain resilient through tough times, and by showing concern for their wellbeing and consideration of the challenges they face, you can remind your top performers why they should stay with your organization.

A recent survey by a UK management training and research institute, found that in the UK job security and motivation have hit an all-time low among public sector managers. This is no doubt reflected across the public sector in the US and beyond as employees adapt to the new reality. Locally, we are seeing a rising number of public sector managers signing up for courses in personal resilience to help them deal with the demands being placed on them at work. In doing this, they are learning to survive and grow through adversity rather than crumble.

So how can your organization help your current and future leaders turn these challenging times into an opportunity for growth and development? Consider the following:

- Do your line managers have the skills and experience needed to effectively manage conflict in the workplace? A challenging environment leads to stress, conflict, and negative internal politics. Could you provide conflict management training or skill development opportunities?
- Is there an organization wide opportunity for line supervisors and managers to come together and compare experiences, offer advice, and develop a broad support network? This can not only offer emotional support to line supervisors and managers when dealing with difficult workplace related issues, but can also be an effective way for more experienced leaders to share their knowledge with the next generation of leaders.
- Is your organization taking a top-slicing approach to budget cuts, rather than using the need to cut budgets as an opportunity to re-structure services? During a period of rapid growth and increased demand for services such as that seen just a few years ago, it's easy to lose long term focus and instead get caught in a 'fight the fire' approach. Now could be the ideal time to help your employees develop critical thinking skills and gain change management experience through a re-evaluation of the current service model.
- Do you offer employees support or training on stress management? For example, does your wellness program include stress management? Can your EAP provider offer any related services?
- Does your organization help employees to explore their sense of identity beyond the workplace and shore them up as individuals? If we can help put their work in perspective it can help make it easier to get through tough times.

By considering such options you can both help move your organization forward, develop leadership skills for the future, and create a positive culture where employees are more likely to feel they are valued as individuals and stick with you through the tough times, and beyond!