

Survival of the fittest - not the thinnest!

The recent spate of firm restructuring and downsizing is testimony to how difficult the current economic conditions are for law firms. With forecasts of worse to come, most firms are casting around for ways to survive the hard times.

The cost base is the obvious place to start and there's nothing wrong with the desire to be lean, but what do you do when there is no more fat to trim? Well, it's the job of the rainmakers then to shore up the other side of the account. But consider this thought:

Over half the people now involved in sales have never experienced a recession.

A whole generation of partners, fee earners and business development people have no previous experience of dealing with a recession. Indeed, most have been operating through one of the longest economic booms since the 1950's. This means they risk doing exactly the wrong things in their efforts to bring in the business.

HuthwaiteFleming has helped organisations survive, and even grow, in economic hard times. So we know more than a little about what's right and wrong. The [linked article](#) has the detail, but here are some headlines.

Putting pressure on the fee earners to work harder at business development is unlikely to produce results.

In all of the research Huthwaite has conducted into high value selling over the past 30 years, one factor has remained constant; 'working harder' doesn't work. The key to success is 'working smarter'.

Focussing sales effort on the best opportunities brings the greatest results.

One way of working smarter is to prioritise your best prospects and put in quality effort with them. Plan how to win the business and explore their needs to build stronger relationships. Don't chase every bit of business. As the Chinese proverb goes: *"Try to catch two monkeys and both will escape."*

Partners and fee earners require higher BD skill levels to sell in a recession.

The training budget is often one of the first casualties in the rush to cut costs, but if your client facing people need training when times are good, why would they need less when times are bad? It's the fittest that survive, not the thinnest.

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A whole range of different commercial skills hold the key to success in a difficult business climate. However, the single most important one is the ability to explore and develop client needs. It's this move from 'seller' to 'trusted adviser' that differentiates the successful sales organisation.

Independent research revealed that training partners and fee earners to use Huthwaite SPIN[®] sales methodology actually increased sales, even in a recession. In one study for **Motorola, sales increased by 17%** in a SPIN[®] trained group, while their untrained counterparts experienced a fall in sales of 13%.

The Motorola SPIN[®] group also **increased their sales to new clients by 63%**. So, if part of your strategy relies on winning more business at the expense of your competitors, you should really read the **case study**.

Other ideas for success in hard times are outlined in detail in the linked article **here**.

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