

A  
slap  
OFF-WHITE  
PAPER



**TOUGH  
TIMES.**

**TOUGHENED  
TEAMS**

SM

How to stand up  
when everything  
around you is  
falling down.

**STAN  
SLAP**

IT IS THE JOB  
OF  
MANAGEMENT  
TO  
BRING  
GOOD ANSWERS  
TO  
BAD  
CIRCUMSTANCES



Companies the world over have elaborate excuses to explain why poor performance is rarely their own fault and instead the result of conditions far beyond their control. They're quick to assign accountability to various Acts of God, forces of nature and world events: **El Niño!—no, wait—La Niña!—no, wait—Katrina! The rise of technology!—no, wait!—the fall of technology! Government interference!—no, wait!—the lack of government interference! Iran!—no, wait—Iraq!—no, wait—Iran! Christmas is falling on a Tuesday! The Kiwi crop has frozen in New Zealand! Those damn killer bees are back!**

Are you managing in maddening times? Yes, but that's not important. What's important is what you do about it. It is the job of management to bring good answers to bad circumstances.

This may not seem so simple when you've never seen circumstances like the ones you find yourself in today. It's easy to become paralyzed and feel that things are beyond your control to affect. That's all it is, just a feeling. In fact, what seems most out of control is most controllable.

**WIDE  
WORLD**  
OF  
**MANAGEMENT  
EXCUSES**<sup>SM</sup>

THOSE DARN EMPLOYEES	THE COMPETITION'S KILLING ME	ACTS OF GOD	BAD NEWS & OTHER STATISTICS	SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME
<b>\$500</b>	<b>\$500</b>	<b>\$500</b>	<b>\$500</b>	<b>\$500</b>
<b>\$250</b>	<b>\$250</b>	<b>\$250</b>	<b>\$250</b>	<b>\$250</b>
<b>\$100</b>	<b>\$100</b>	<b>\$100</b>	<b>\$100</b>	<b>\$100</b>
<b>\$50</b>	<b>\$50</b>	<b>\$50</b>	<b>\$50</b>	<b>\$50</b>

# ECONOMY <sup>THE</sup> IS <sup>IN</sup> RUINS!

**M**any perceive the economy as a tornado—an unpredictable force of nature that roars through the business community, flipping slow-moving cows and august investment houses into roadside ditches. Yet what has befallen the world economies was entirely man made, foreseeable and forestallable.

The good news is that it's so bad.

If the problem were contained within one industry or even one country, it could be allowed to fester, but it's wide and deep and it has to be fixed fast, with major global intervention. Take heart: Businesses will once again spend in order to grow and consumers will once again buy what they don't really need with money they don't really have.

In the meantime, consider this: Why can the economy apparently only hurt but never help? When revenue increases in an upturn economy, managers claim the credit—it's clearly due to their boundless vision and tireless expertise. When revenue declines in a downturn economy, managers blame the economy—it's clearly out of their hands.

And if a recession is stopping your customers from buying, why are some companies not only surviving but posting record gains? The recession isn't really the issue. Your reaction to the recession is the issue.

**BOTTOM  
LINE:**

**GOOD MANAGEMENT WILL DEFEAT A BAD ECONOMY.**

# OUR CUSTOMERS ~~ARE~~ **HAVE** CHANGED

**Y**our customers may have temporarily restricted their discretionary spending and they may have less patience with a badly run business, but one thing will never change: The most dependable indicator of customer loyalty is to become branded. When you are truly branded you transfer sustainability of the company to your customers. Customers advertise and sell for you and will step up to save you if you stumble or get attacked.

Common talk says that a brand is about achieving trust from customers. Nah, trust is easy. A brand is about achieving the highest level of trust possible amongst human beings. A brand is about faith. Faith is, "I believe, but I don't know." A brand is an extension of a special kind of faith: By serving and saving your company, I serve and save myself.

There is more mythology, misdirection, superstition and generalized academic babble about branding than about most business subjects. In reality, big is not branded or Siberia would be a brand. Branding is not a verb; it's a tribute—your company can't claim or demand to be branded; it has to be given to you by customers. Branding is not an action; it's a reaction—it's not what you do; it's what happens when you do it. Branding and advertising are different things—branding isn't about communicating your intent to the world; it's about why the world should care.

Any company can become branded but you have to do the things that brands do for the reasons that brands do them. First is to anchor the business to a noble purpose—beyond its argument for revenue, brands are conceived as a delivery vehicle to build a better world. If your only passion is for making money, the cost of obtaining that money will always prove more difficult and expensive than it needs to be.

Whatever claims you want recognized about your company's product must also be present in its process—in the experience that a customer goes through to buy and use the product. There is nothing your company sells that a customer can't buy somewhere else or even choose to do without—except an intimate, values-based relationship between company and customer. If you want to be a successful brand, you must be branded for how you sell, not just for what you sell.

**BOTTOM  
LINE:**

**CUSTOMERS DON'T  
RAISE EXPECTATIONS.  
COMPANIES LOWER FULFILLMENT.**

WE HAVE TO DO  
**MORE**  
WITH FEWER PEOPLE!

**Y**our company may be currently betting its life on the ability to roll out new strategies to the marketplace—ahead of schedule, ahead of budget, on the heads of your competitors. Yet most strategies in most companies don't really work. They don't really do what they were supposed to do, cost what they were supposed to cost or happen when they were supposed to happen.

This is because even the smartest companies subscribe to the most dangerous strategic myth: A strategy has to be planned well to be successful. In fact, a strategy has to be implemented well to be successful.

"Implemented well" means that your company must be able to dependably enroll its employee culture in fierce support of that strategy. If you can do this, you're well on the way to achieving strategic insurance. If you can't, and you think strategies will be successful anyway, you're building a base camp on Mount Delusional.

Which employee could argue with the irrefutable logic of urgent strategies during these trying times? Forget about the logic: Neither business logic, nor management authority nor any compelling competitive urgency will convince an employee culture to adopt a corporate cause as if it were its own. In the killing field between company concept and employee commitment lies many a failed strategic plan.

If you want your employees to buy a strategy, you have to know how to sell it to them. This means selling to the employees—knowing how the culture works and how to work the culture. It's not a matter of informing the culture; it's a matter of inspiring it. It's not a matter of PowerPoint or bonus programs; it's a matter of vision and values. It's not a matter of logic; it's a matter of logical methods for stirring deep response.

An employee culture is the simplest operating system in the world: It's solely concerned with survival and emotional prosperity. Unfortunately, that's its own survival and emotional prosperity, not yours and not the company's. Still, it's a rational organism and will devote resources to achieving any strategic goal as long as it can link that goal with its own priorities. The culture has plenty of commitment to give as long as it perceives that it's safe and sensible to give it.

Because an employee culture is an information-gathering organism designed to protect itself, its antennae are constantly working, its perceptions are alarmingly accurate, its credibility detector is infallible and its memory is elephantine. Management can't bluff, bribe or bully an employee culture. You can't stop an employee culture from existing and you can't tell it what to believe.

What you *can* do is respect its power to make or break any corporate survival strategy. You can imbed your strategic and performance goals with the opportunity to satisfy what's most important to the culture, not just to the company.

You can't sell it outside if you can't sell it inside. Remember this one point when depending on strategic success and you'll be halfway home. Or in a halfway home. Either way, you'll have made progress.

**BOTTOM  
LINE:**

**IT'S NOT WHOM YOU HAVE, IT'S WHAT THEY GIVE.**

THE COMPETITION  
**KILLING**  
US

**W**hat are the components of business success? Dependable and relevant product line, highest-quality customer experience, fierce cash management, responsible growth, constant innovation and refinement, strategically sound marketing, and competent and cooperative management teams leading motivated employees.

Which of these components do your competitors control in your company? Nada. None. Nothing. Zero. Zilch. Your company is its own competition and can deliver itself debilitating blows the competition only dreams of.

Energy is limited during these difficult times and needs to be focused on where it can best help you. Instead of worrying about the competition, turn your attention inside and fix what made your company vulnerable to a competitive threat in the first place.

**BOTTOM  
LINE:**

**DO WHAT  
YOU DO BEST AND  
FORGET THE REST.**

Sure

Steps

On

Rocky Road

# Stay on the solution side.

The best organizations hold themselves as accountable for their problems as they do for their successes. Their victories are built upon learning from both and growing ever stronger—even during tough times. Especially during tough times.

A bias for solutions must be reinforced through every layer of the enterprise. Once people are allowed to blame external conditions for internal performance, all hope of aggressive and creative responses departs and helplessness and cynicism take their place.

The first step to solving any problem is to accept one's own accountability for creating it. Causing a culture of accountability means influencing people to take their sense of self from how they fearlessly confront problems and embrace new solutions.

An employee culture will watch to see what management emphasizes, what it rewards, what it gives priority attention to and what it ignores. It will watch to see what the company protects and what it punishes. It will use all of these impressions to form beliefs about how to behave. The culture will protect a prized sense—Tough times? Tougher team—no matter what it takes. Creating success against all odds is a small price to pay.

*Here are four fast things you can do right now to keep your organization on the solution side:*



## a.

**Don't hang out with the losers, commiserating about poor performance.**

Instead, have people analyze the winners—of every size, in every industry—that continue to outperform expectations even in a troubled market. Deconstruct how they are achieving success and adapt those behaviors and strategies to your own business.

## b.

**Don't panic about media speculation.**

The darker the day for the human condition, the brighter the news day, so there will always be plenty of stories about how things are bad and doubtless going to get worse. It's the media's job to sell media, not to fix business problems. It's your job to fix business problems.

If it's also your job to talk to the media, be careful about claiming to be unable to provide a confident company response to uncertain conditions. Your employee culture is listening.

## c.

**Prohibit equations of denial.**

An equation of denial is when the Peanut Company of America recently claimed that "Continued product recalls have caused us to declare bankruptcy." Actually, flagrantly continuing to poison consumers by allowing rat waste to fall into the chunky peanut butter is what caused the product recalls. In turn, this caused federal penalties, individual lawsuits, furious customers and an aghast public, which combined to cause the bankruptcy.

When any company claims that reduced customer spending has caused a decline in revenue, this is an equation of denial. Failure to anticipate or react to circumstances causing reduced customer spending is what caused a decline in revenue.

The only equation for success is the equation of accountability:

WE DID OR  
DIDN'T DO THIS  
=  
THIS IS WHAT  
HAPPENED

## d.

**Endlessly chant the solution mantra:**

"Whining" is not a strategy.

"Victim" is not a job description.

"Everyone else is in trouble too" is not management information.

# 2

## Raise the bar.

The traditional intent of business has always been to create value—to bring a compelling value proposition to its market. In this era of multiple buying choices and greatly enhanced customer intelligence, relying on value alone risks commoditizing your product and forcing margin-shredding competitive battles. The companies that are surviving current conditions have gone beyond value to also make their case on relevance.

These companies have proven themselves more relevant to customers than ever by thinking seriously and with purity on their behalf—delivering urgent business improvement support that sometimes even reduces the short-term incentive to buy. This isn't as reckless as it sounds: It's what will cause your customers to make sure you stay around long enough for them to repay the favor.

As much an improvement as this is it's only part of the relevance required. The world is a complex and confusing place. There's a lot happening in it and it's happening to your customers, not just as companies but as people. If you want to be relevant to your customers only when you're trying to sell something, you are choosing to be irrelevant to them for the rest of the time.

You may understandably want to stop short of taking a social activism position on world events, but your customer experience can still reflect an understanding that the world exists beyond the company-customer business relationship. Your company can take a position about what is right with the world that must be protected and what is wrong with the world that must be corrected. You can turn some attention to the people within your customers' companies when their world turns up or upside down.

You don't have to fear your own company being perceived as human. You want it to be perceived as human. People don't trust companies; they trust people. This is true even if you're selling business-to-business. You're not selling to the enterprise; you're selling to human beings representing the enterprise and the same rule applies.

It may seem a little, ah, ...late... to be preventing the problems that you're now actually facing but take heart: There will be plenty of other problems in the future. This is as good a time as any to get ahead of them.

When things go wrong, companies are generally at their reactionary, defensive, uncoordinated worst. It's when your company should be at its proactive, outstanding, coordinated best.

Start by planning ahead for everything that could go wrong—it will only seem like an infinite list until you start compiling it. Meet in work teams to find the best possible response to each, write them down as "battle station" commands and regularly rehearse in emergency drills. Doing this now, amidst everything else you may be dealing with, will give your people a sense of control over what comes next.

## Control the damage ahead of time.

# 3

# 4

## Consider the upside.

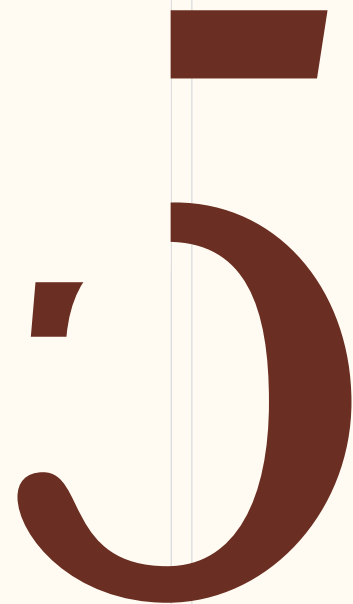
Being perky during these painful times is at best annoying and at worst delusional. Still, there are some undeniable advantages that can be gained only by experiencing such circumstances.

Many management teams have never seen really bad times before and have no idea of how to achieve results if the internal resources and external interest they've grown accustomed to go missing. Operating in times of duress and scarcity will make any manager wiser and tougher.

A culture is never more united than when it's aroused, either by attack or inspiration. Both your employee and customer cultures are now under attack; this means they're more susceptible to inspiration. Those managers and companies who do the right thing are going to be noticed and remembered for it.



Don't lose  
your mind.  
Don't lose  
your heart.



This would seem the obvious time to slash costs, whack prices and cut services. Drop the weapons: All this violence can hurt you more than help you.

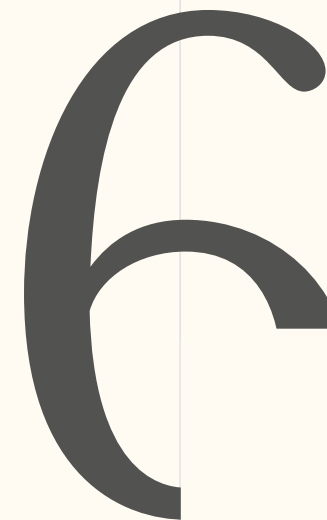
Slashing costs is always a healthy exercise, to a point. The danger is in halting momentum in innovation, safety and development of key talent, areas where you cannot easily restart and which threaten the continuing viability of the business. Business history has demonstrated that companies that continued to spend in these areas during recessionary times emerged more stable and successful than their competitors.

Whacking prices too hard can quickly reposition your offerings after years of building a value proposition. The worst position a company can be in is to be a commodity selling commodities; have that happen now and it could be fatal. If at all possible, hold the line on as many of your offerings as possible and present a confident, long-term statement.

Cutting services is dangerous if you end up penalizing the customer—don't make your problems their problems. You may think you can't afford some services any more, but that doesn't mean your customer doesn't still want them and won't reconsider their loyalty if they're removed. What to do if you really can't afford to continue? Develop new ones that cost less but might mean even more. How do you do that? Involve your customers; they've always had a lot to say about your business and this is the time to establish the dialogue.

Even more important than not losing your mind is not losing your heart. This is the time to be hyper-vigilant about what you believe in most—about how people inside and outside of the company are treated and about your company's responsibility to the world.

Don't compromise what you believe in regardless of temptation or stress. If you do, your ultimate survival is going to mean a lot less than it should.



Look backward.  
Not forward.

Tightened commercial credit. Bank failures. Excess housing inventory. Uncertain impact of government intervention. Disappearance and reorganization of large enterprises and massive damage to multiple connected sectors. Unpredictable earnings. Fragile state of emerging world economies. Massive losses in personal wealth at all earning levels.

Ay yi yi.

Looking forward for clarity and reassurance amidst these conditions is a depressing and futile exercise. Don't do it. Instead, look backward.

These bad times won't last forever. The story of how you stood up to them will. Now is the time to write that story so that it ends exactly the way you want it to.

# NOVA

# WHIA

slap exists to help organizations and their management teams. Eliminating all the excuses for poor performance may not seem like that much help—what are you going to blame now? Relax, we've got your back. Here are ten substitute cutting edge explanations for why it couldn't possibly be your fault that sales are down, product and marketing strategies didn't work and all your top talent is leaving.





# COMETS!

There are 100 billion comets in an Oort cloud (a cloud full of comets) and if even one in a hundred was disturbed by a passing star, then one billion comets would enter our solar system and could easily collide with us. Under ordinary circumstances, there's less than a one-in-a-billion chance that this will happen.

These are not, as you might have guessed, ordinary circumstances.

Scientists now believe an Oort cloud itself is in our solar system, just beyond what is thought to be a tenth planet. This makes it very possible that a comet will eventually destroy Earth. Oh, great, a new planet—as if you didn't already have enough competition.

# BEEES!

Colony collapse disorder is what occurs when a colony's worker bees abruptly disappear. This is happening at an alarming rate around the world, starting in 2005. Feral honeybees in North America are now almost nonexistent and there has been a significant decline throughout the rest of the world, from Europe to China to India.

You have your own labor problems to deal with during these tough times. Why should you worry about a bunch of stupid bees that didn't show up for work? Well, there's the potential ecological apocalypse that could collapse the food chain and wipe out humanity, for one thing. No more bees means no more pollination means no more plants means no more animals means no more man means no more market share.

So what's up with these bees? Everything from genetically modified crops to pesticides is being blamed, but two main causes are emerging as most probable: electromagnetic signals from cell phones and stress. "We've been pushing them too hard," says Dr. Peter Keven, professor of environmental biology at the University of Ontario. Evidently, the pressure of keeping up with email on their BlackBerries is killing the little things. Wait a minute....

The decline is continuing and some scientists estimate that if bees become extinct, then humans have only four years of life left. Obvious learning point: Don't waste time constructing any five-year strategic plans.



# The ANTI-CHRIST!

American, uh, psychic Jeanne Dixon insisted that the Antichrist was born on February 5, 1962, which would mean he got his driver's license in 1976 and was exposed to disco music smack out of puberty, no doubt causing his evil powers to mutate. Dixon assured her readers that the ultimate conflict between the Antichrist and God is going to take place real soon, so don't open any emails from [yourpal@antichrist.com](mailto:yourpal@antichrist.com).



# POLE SHIFT!

American, uh, prophet Edgar Cayce predicted that within the next several years a pole shift will occur, causing Earth to tumble end over end for several days. According to Cayce, most of the continents as we now know them will cease to exist. None of that will matter, though, because we won't be around to see this new world order. Only cockroaches and discount imported rug retailers are thought capable of surviving.

# The BIG ONE!

In his book *Rolling Thunder*, J. R. Jochmans, Ph.D., reports that earthquakes will become so frequent and violent within the next two to three years that "The Richter Scale (which measures the degree of earthquake intensity from 0-10—each number representing ten times the destructive power of the previous number) will have to be revised to include an 11 and a 12." Dr. Jochmans confidently states that the California coastline will drop off into the sea, and the Pacific Ocean will reach all the way to Nebraska. Having the entertainment industry and the wine country located in Nebraska will cause consequences too horrifying to contemplate.



# OVERPOPULATION!

The good news: There are more people than ever to buy your products. The bad news? All those people are destroying the planet. Reasonable estimates are that the Earth can support 529 million people—we are, shall we say, "over budget" by 10 times that amount right now. Scientists have linked everything from global warming, the death of the rainforests, acid rain and an increase in serial killers to the human race far exceeding the capacity of the planet it inhabits. Focus! Focus! The good news is that there are more people than ever to buy your products.



# FAMINE!

Scientists agree that 70% of the dry regions of the Earth have degenerated into desert. This, too, is caused mostly by overpopulation—the massive crowding of our planet, which means more and more food crops have to be planted to feed people and the land isn't allowed to "rest." The soil gets drained of nutrients and becomes unable to support any more crops. It is predicted that this will eventually result in worldwide famine. Seems like lately it's always fourth quarter for Mother Nature. She needs some comp time just like you do, or she's gonna get burned out and a little pissy, just like you do.

# WATER!

"The world has got a *very* big water problem," says Sir Crispin Tickell, former British ambassador to the U.N. A name like Crispin Tickell would drive anyone to drink plenty of water—with plenty of scotch in it.

"Wars of the next century will be fought over water," emphatically states World Bank's Ismail Serageldin. The U.N. figures there are already 300 potential conflicts over water in the world. The explosive potential is most serious where supplies are limited. Think the Middle East. And think China, where only 30% of the nation's water supply is potable.

"You can have my bottle of Evian when you can pry it

from my cold, dead fingers," you may be sneering. Better clutch that bottle tightly because another might not be so easy to come by in the future. Scientists predict that two-thirds of the world will suffer from shortages of fresh water by 2025 and that the per capita water supply will drop by a third, while the global population is projected to rise by 40-50% within 50 years. Seventy percent of the world's water supply is used for agriculture, so we may be able to keep drinking for awhile. If we give up eating.

True, three-fourths of the planet is covered with the stuff. But only 2.5% of it is fresh and 70% of that is in the form of ice at the North and South Poles. Most of the rest is soaked in soil or is deep in underground aquifers that are inaccessible to man. We can get our hands on less than 1% of all fresh water on Earth.

Talk around the water cooler in your company will soon be, "Hey, where's the water?"



(THE RETURN OF)

# EL NIÑO!

El Niño has been causing climatic chaos going back at least 15,000 years, according to scientists who have unearthed clues to its prehistoric presence in the mud of a South American lake. The Geneva-based World Meteorological Organization says the phenomenon became more frequent beginning 5,000 years ago, and its modern-day cycle is every two to eight years—expect it back any time now.

In the meantime, El Niño's significant other isn't sitting at home, watching her soaps and munching Bon Bons. Give a big hello to La Niña. Known as the "cold tongue" (youch!), this equally destructive aberrant weather pattern is happening right now, causing abnormally cold ocean conditions, suddenly reversed weather, massively destructive rains and winds. Better batten down those P&Ls.



## ALL THESE SCIENTISTS!

A recent study by New York University estimates that 85% of all scientists who've ever lived are alive today. It's reasonable to assume that if they've already come up with all of these studied analyses about what can befall your company, they're hard at work on plenty more projections of doom. Best to just give up now, eh?



**“Whining” is  
not a strategy.**

**“Victim” is  
not a job  
description.**

**“Everyone else  
is in trouble  
too” is not  
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**YOUR  
STRATEGIES  
MAY BE  
ROCKET SCIENCE.**

**PERFECT.**

**WE'RE  
IN THE  
ROCKET FUEL  
BUSINESS.™**

**slap**

slap achieves ferocious commitment in manager, employee and customer cultures. We will deliver emotional commitment from your managers, support for strategies and goals from your employees and get you branded by your customers.

Let's just assume you're interested in these sorts of things.

Our unique solutions are highest rated in many of the world's highest-rated companies. Companies that don't include "patience" on their list of corporate values.

No one has ever called slap ordinary—methods used or results achieved.

**slapcompany.com**

450 Geary Street, Suite 100 San Francisco 94102  
415.362.1240

stan@slapcompany.com