**CONFERENCE SPEECH**

**FOR**

**DONNETTA RUSSELL**

Hello everyone. I am Donnetta Russell and I want to thank \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for giving me the opportunity to speak at this conference. It is gratifying to be in the presence of so many like-minded professionals. I know that I have found that, as with every aspect of life and professionalism, there is no such thing as too much information. Although we are all connected to some form of technology, whether for business or for our personal lives, information comes at us at a dizzying pace, and it drives the need to know more and be more savvy. It forces us to pay attention- to think more quickly and be more adaptable in order to succeed in uncertain times.

Every era and generation faces their own unique set of challenges. After all, it **WAS** American patriot Thomas Paine who said, “These are the times that try mens’ souls.” He stated that during the days that led up to the AMERICAN Revolutionary War, and if you ask me, the expression is as contemporary and as fitting now as it was almost three hundred years ago. The theme of this conference is, “Leading During Uncertainty.” Between economic upheaval, volatile global crises, extraordinary and violent natural disasters, and sweeping changes in all sectors of business, the only thing we can truly be sure of is **UNCERTAINTY**. Now, more than ever, it is our mandate, as leaders, to provide concrete information and advice in order to confront challenges and sustain our businesses. We must learn to be adaptable in all conditions. It is the tough times that build character, strength, and resilience

My personal mantra is, “Managers drive people to work... in servitude, while leaders give DRIVE. True leaders inspire, and innovate, they recognize the unique talents of their staff and they value the people who are there to mutually support the missions and goals of the businesses for which they work. True leaders empower their staffs and encourage self development and accountability. Henry Ford said, “Whether you think you can or you think you can’t, you’re right.” An effective leader **KNOWS** he or she **CAN** and makes sure their teams know their own strengths.

Let’s face it.... the most important piece of the corporate puzzle is it’s workforce - successful and effective levels of employee engagement is key to the success of a business. None of us can manage our duties alone. And our most important elements that we have as leaders and managers are our employees, our **HUMAN RESOURCES..** It is urgent that we have a workforce that is engaged, involved, and committed to cultivating, respecting, and retaining a productive, involved staff. In a study published by Gallup in 2016, on the topic of worldwide employee engagement, the findings show that it’s not enough to conduct surveys to discover and measure employee engagement, Gallup has been conducting these particular surveys for the past sixteen years and they have found little improvement in the rate of engagement of the Amercan and global workforce. In 2016, while 32% of the American workforce was considered to be engaged, that number drops to just 13% when examined from a global perspective. Gallup points out that it’s one thing to measure engagement and an entirely different challenge to find ways to **improve** engagement. In reality, the more uncertain the professional prognosis, the more it is incumbent upon us as leaders to encourage engagement, and by addressing that issue and finding effective solutions, one aspect of uncertainty can be diminished.

In order to improve employee retention and engagement, the article suggests considering the following:

* “Understand where your company is today and where it intends to be in the future.” A three year milestone roadmap is suggested, but it’s also important to be flexible in order to adapt to the shifts in performance.
* “Employee engagement is an integral part of the entire corporate picture.” Clarify work expectations, examine what employees need in order to get the job done and provide those resources, promote positive co-working relationships, play to the individual’s strengths while encouraging productivity, and keep lines of communication open and respected.

The article ends by advising, “Managers and leaders should keep employee engagement top of mind—because every interaction with employees can have an impact on.... organizational performance.”

The culture of thinking a job is “for life,” the tradition of earning a gold watch for an impressive tenure, even the demonstration of loyalty through paid benefits is rapidly vanishing. At any given time, it is believed that about 50% of our workforce is looking for another job. Somehow we must find and confront the road back to employee commitment, loyalty, and accountability. A stable workforce will allow an organization to have resilience in increasingly uncertain times. What are some of the strategies that you have tested as a means of offsetting uncertainty? Do you have flex hours? Do you allow your employees to work remotely when it’s a viable option? Is your staff restricted by rules and regulations that may no longer serve their purposes? When you have employee reviews, do you LISTEN.... really LISTEN to your staff’s comments and suggestions? Do your managers consider an employee’s current work load before assigning new tasks and projects?

We can’t account for crises we can’t identify, we cannot be expected to anticipate natural disasters. We also can’t predict the unpredictable, but we can be aware of the climate within our companies’ walls and we can address them with pro-activity and genuine interest. Businesses do not run by rote. Every business is a living, breathing organism that shifts and changes daily and it is the effective leader that pays attention, maintains alertness, shows regard and respect for all workers and colleagues, and is poised to shift and bend with the times.... **THOSE** will be the businesses that survive. Many years ago, a wise man coined the phrase, “Adapt or die.” That phrase is more important than ever. Adapt. Communicate. Innovate. Thank you all!