



**FROM THE DESK OF BOB WILSON**

**Maximizing Results Through People**  
**A CEO to CEO Quarterly Newsletter -- 11-15-01**

Dear Fellow CEO:

**Did We Volunteer For This?**

Leadership. When we signed on to lead our businesses, did we have any idea what that would mean in today's world? Would we be determining strategy? Sure. Making tough decisions? I signed on for that. Firing people? Never easy, but sometimes you've got to do it.

What about reassuring people after the twin towers of the World Trade Center collapsed? That wasn't in the job description I'd envisioned. Looking calm during anthrax scares? What?? Making business decisions when the world seems to be coming apart at the seams and trying to make those decisions take on some sense of importance? It's not supposed to be like this. I don't remember signing up for this. Do you?

But isn't this inherent to our job description in today's terrified new world?

I saw a hint of what was to come some 10 years ago. I remember sitting in a fellow CEO's office as he showed me a hate letter he'd received from a personal terrorist. It spewed vitriol and threats that sent chills down my spine. If I knew what anthrax was then, the letter would have felt dusted. I asked the CEO what he was going to do about it. "Nothing", he said. "I'm going to act like nothing happened." He went about his business of doing business.

It gave him the chills too, but it was just a new part of the job and a part he had to live with. At the time, I think, he just wanted to share the agony of it. And, as his P. I. consultant, I was as good a person to share it with as anyone. I doubt anyone but he and I saw it.

He certainly felt fear and anger. But, he couldn't show either. He couldn't let his feelings effect or be seen by the other people who worked in his organization. He knew he had to be calm and be a buffer to the fear he felt – even in the face of what was bordering on a death threat. I admired the bravery of his response. But, I sure didn't envy the role he had to play. He had to act normal and conduct business. Eventually, the situation would resolve itself.

Today, in the face of a terror war on our shores, acting normally is a role we must all think about, and I believe, play well if we are to win the war against terror.

As a leader, as a spouse, as a parent, as a friend; we must try, as much as possible, to suck up our own fear, our own terror, and, in spite of everything, act normal. We must try to do things as we normally do. Why? We're just leading little companies, not the free world. Why do we have to accept a burden of leadership we didn't sign up for?

Because we chose to lead, that's why. Whether we like our reality or not, many of those just mentioned above look to us, as CEO's, to set a tone for how to respond to our present world. We're not the only ones being watched, certainly. Elected leaders, news anchor people, and celebrities among others all are also being carefully observed. Why? People look to leaders to lead – not only when it's expected, as in day-to-day business decisions, but, in times like these. They look to leaders to see how they should respond. To see what they should do.

For example, the televised concert staged to raise money for the WTC disaster has already raised more than \$1,000,000,000. Celebrity leaders set examples that were followed by millions.

Bob Wilson & Associates, Inc.

**PI**  
Management  
RESOURCES™

P.O. Box 3039  
Carmel, IN 46082

Phone: 317-574-1550  
Fax: 317-844-6267  
[www.bobwilsonconsulting.com](http://www.bobwilsonconsulting.com)

If, as CEO's, we cower behind our desks and do nothing, what signal does that send as to what those around us should do? If we bury our heads and wait until the world is acting normally to do anything proactive with our businesses, what do you imagine those around us will learn from that inaction and carry into their lives?

What about the recession? Doesn't that argue for caution, given that the economy stinks? Doesn't it make sense to hold back, to be conservative in the face of conditions that are, at best, economically tenuous?

I think there are two issues at work here. First, it is only sensible to make decisions that preserve the strength of our businesses. We should not be foolish in our efforts to act normal. Acting normal doesn't mean spending money that might deprive our businesses their ability to thrive.

On the other hand, I would encourage us all to do our best to act in our business decisions as though a recession doesn't exist. Act as though there is no terrorist war. Act as though anthrax didn't exist and the World Trade Center did. If there are actions to take in our businesses to improve either their short or long term health, and we have the wherewithal to take them, we need to act.

As CEO's of businesses in America we can contribute to our victory over terrorism and to a recovery of the economy in other ways than by donating money and blood. We can do what Americans and particularly American businesspeople are known for doing – showing unwavering optimism and confidence even when it's not fully warranted. We need to show our faith in our system by continuing to behave optimistically, confidently and capitalistically within it. We need to act normal.

If we don't, the fear around us will billow into terror and the terror will explode leaving a world where like scared rabbits, we are all stopped in our tracks, paralyzed. If we do that we will lose the war and our leadership will have failed.

As my friend did years ago, we need to "act like nothing happened". Will there be fear? Undoubtedly. Will it be hard? That's why they pay us the big bucks. But, if we ***act as normal***, we will prevail because others will gain strength from us, even if we don't really feel so strong ourselves. And we will gain strength from the strength of those around us.

And know, if you want to share the fear you feel, you can call your P. I. consultant or me. I promise we'll listen. We feel it too. We're just trying not to show it.

Thanks for listening.



Bob Wilson, President  
Bob Wilson & Associates, Inc.

P. S. We've finished moving into our renovated headquarters at 210 North Rangeline Road in Carmel. If you're anywhere near the vicinity, stop in and say hello. We'd like to show you around.